

also by Derek Patmore

THE STAR AND THE CRESCENT

*An Anthology of
Modern Turkish Poetry*



EMILY AUGUSTE PATMORE, 'the Angel in the House'
Oil painting by John Brett, R.A.

DEREK PATMORE

The
Life and Times of
COVENTRY PATMORE

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In 1935 Derek Patmore published a book called "Portrait of My Family", the text of which has been adapted and enlarged for re-publication under the present title. A number of unpublished letters from Carlyle, Ruskin, Monckton Milnes, Bridges, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Edmund Gosse are now first printed.

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For
Brigit—my Mother

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CHAPTER ONE

The Return of a Victorian

THE story of a family can be as fascinating as any novel. What books could have been written by turning over the family albums if only the families had allowed it! But, as a rule, the relatives of a man who has achieved public eminence are loath to publish facts which will destroy a long-cherished legend. With the eternal desire for respectability, they would rather leave their ancestors alone than know the more exciting truth.

Coventry Patmore, like other famous men, has suffered from this family desire to conceal unpleasant truths. The official biography, published in 1900, *The Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore* by Basil Champneys, was a monumental work in two volumes into which the discreet author, an architect by profession, gathered practically all the facts that are known about the poet, his ancestry, his three wives and his seven children. Champneys was given access to all the Patmore papers by Coventry Patmore's widow, but he deliberately suppressed all details concerning the poet's passionate friendship with Alice Meynell for fear of offending the last Mrs. Patmore. He also omitted many letters showing the less flattering sides of Coventry Patmore's character. Indeed, the complex, contradictory and fascinating personality of the poet was drowned in a mass of family documents.

Sir Edmund Gosse, who was Patmore's original choice as his literary executor, somewhat redressed the balance with his *Life* published in 1905, but he, too, had his hands tied by the existence of the last Mrs. Patmore, who watched over her husband's literary fame and her own reputation with a watchful care. Later writers have dealt with many aspects of Patmore's work, especially his poetry, but few attempted to set the poet against his family background. This, I, as a direct descendant,

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tried to do in the original edition of this book when it was published in 1935, making use of many family papers.

Now, another world-war has made the gap with the past even deeper. The process of time has released further interesting details and letters about Coventry Patmore's life which were not available when this book was first issued. This lapse of time has also allowed me to view my great-grandfather and his times in a more objective light. Moreover the last family barrier has been removed. The poet's only surviving son, Captain Francis Patmore, who was still alive when *Portrait of my Family* first appeared, is now dead. This has permitted me to reveal important facts about his mother, Harriet Patmore, which I concealed for fear of wounding him during his lifetime. In this new and revised edition, I have attempted to present as complete a portrait of the poet as possible—showing him in all his weaknesses and strength. Coventry Patmore is so challenging a personality that he can bear this scrutiny—indeed, he himself would have welcomed it, for he was ever searching for the truth.

When this book first appeared, the revival of interest in Coventry Patmore and his poems had only just begun after a long eclipse. Like most Victorian writers and poets, Patmore had suffered from the early twentieth century reaction against what seemed at the time the unbearable smugness and complacency of the Victorian era. A generation that had endured the horrors and shock of the first World War had little time for a poet who seemed obsessed with the joys of married love. Only a select few loved him for his later mystical poems.

A new generation has now arisen. One with little hope and few illusions. A generation that is vainly seeking spiritual values and a solution to the troubled times. For them, Coventry Patmore is no longer the slightly ridiculous poet of matrimony, but a mystic and a religious poet of the highest order. Younger readers are discovering that Patmore was a poet with a message, and this fact bears out his own prophecy that only future generations would understand and appreciate his work.

Coventry Patmore was a poet obsessed with an idea; a man who felt that he must devote all his creative powers to communicating this idea in the form of a message to the rest of the world. Writing of his own work he described it as speaking

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'but of forgotten things to far-off times to come'; while Osbert Burdett, commenting on the poet's aim in his *The Idea of Coventry Patmore*, says:

He is one of the few poets who have tried to build a philosophy of life out of the experiences of love; and his attempt is original because it is not, as were previous attempts, based upon any disregard or arbitrary manipulation of facts, but was inspired by an unusually frank admission of them. . . . There have been two previous attempts to make love the basis of a comprehensive philosophy. The first was made by Plato, the second by Dante. Each of his predecessors influenced Coventry Patmore, but he differed in a capital point from both. . . . 'God is Love' we find it written, but we do not find, at least with the same insistence, that nuptial love was God-like. That was Coventry Patmore's opportunity. His real original contribution to Western mystic literature is to supply the emphasis, elsewhere lacking, on the divine nature of human love.

Viewed in this light his epic poem *The Angel in the House* becomes merely the forerunner of *The Unknown Eros*, and the culmination of his mystical philosophy is to be found in his last volume of prose, *The Rod, the Root, And the Flower*. Human and Divine Love is the theme running through all his work. No other Victorian writer studied or analysed the subject so thoroughly. 'My love,' he wrote, 'not only dares the most searching light of philosophy, but requires it.'

Steeped in the mystical writings of the past, he divined that an analogy could be found between the love of the soul for God and the love between a man and a woman, and he dedicated his later poetry to expounding this idea.

He was an explorer in the uncharted seas of love. He experienced the deviations of passion in his own life and embodied many of them in his poems, therefore a knowledge of his private life is essential to the understanding of his poetry. Coventry Patmore tried to practise what he preached. His poem *The Toys* proves that he was well aware of his personal failures. But he knew success too. His first marriage with Emily Andrews was of such felicity and harmony that he spent the rest of his life seeking to repeat it. This search for perfect love is one of the dramas of Coventry Patmore's private life.

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As he grew older he found that knowledge brings its own desolation and his last years were lonely. His disciple, Francis Thompson, infers this in his lines called *A Captain of Song* when he wrote of the poet:

He has trod the ways afar,
The fatal ways of parting and farewell,
Where all the paths of pained greatness are;
Where round and always round
The abhorred words resound
The words accursed of comfortable men—
'For Ever . . .

And he himself notes 'that the happiest life was a tragedy or a series of tragedies.'

Coventry Patmore had an almost religious feeling about the vocation of a poet. As he reached old age, he felt that he was a prophet. In *The Rod, The Root, And the Flower* he says:

The poet alone has the power of saying the truth 'which it is not lawful to utter', that the disc with its withering heat and blinding brilliance is wholly invisible, while enough warmth and light are allowed to pass through the clouds of his speech to diffuse daylight and genial warmth.

This little-known book of aphorisms, published in 1895, in the opinion of so discerning a modern critic as Mr. Herbert Read deserves to be ranked with Pascal's *Pensées*, but it still remains to be discovered by modern readers.

Patmore was also a man of faith. Deeply religious by nature, he believed in God and soon reconciled his erotic temperament to religion by becoming a convert to Catholicism. Practising this creed, he merged his love of woman with that of the Virgin Mary. He also did not scruple to use the classical Greek myths to show that all real love is divine. In his lonely search for the key to the mystery of life and love, Patmore forestalled modern psychologists and theorists like Otto Weininger, in the theory of the polarity of sexes. For in *The Rod, The Root, And the Flower* he writes: 'The external man and woman are each the projected simulacrum of the latent half of the other, and they do but love themselves in thus loving their opposed likenesses.'

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At the same time, he believed that religion and not science held the key to final knowledge. Discussing his own religious poetry he says:

Very few good poets have ever attempted to write religious poetry, knowing the almost insuperable difficulty. In the few who have attempted it nature and humanity have withered up instead of being beatified and developed by the religious thought. The Incarnation, in fact, is merely a dogma. It has not got beyond mere thoughts. Perhaps it will take thousands of years to work itself into feelings, as it must do before religion can become matter of poetry.

It is greatly to Patmore's credit that he did attempt the difficult task of writing such poetry. In what Osbert Burdett aptly called 'the barren mountain air' of *The Unknown Eros* there are Odes like *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore* and *Eros and Psyche* which flash like bright-cut diamonds, and justify Mr. Desmond MacCarthy's claim that 'Patmore is the greatest religious poet in the English language since the seventeenth century.'

But his final great work in honour of the Marriage of the Virgin Mary remained unfinished. Only the fragment *The Childe's Purchase* exists of what the poet thought would be his masterpiece.

Although most of his contemporaries failed to appreciate his later work, Patmore believed in his vocation as a poet. There were no doubts in the mind of a man who could say about his work: 'I have written only of my best. I have respected posterity; and should there be a posterity which cares for letters, I dare to hope that it will respect me.'

Augustine Birrell once told me as he sat in Sir John Lavery's studio, evoking a world that was past: 'Coventry Patmore was one of the handsomest men I ever saw. . . . He looked like a poet, and he considered himself unquestionably the greatest poet of his day.'

The most striking of all the portraits of Coventry Patmore—Sargent's—hangs to-day in the National Portrait Gallery, London, where, in the words of Sir Edmund Gosse: 'A hand of consummate power has fixed forever on canvas the apocalyp-

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tical old age of Coventry Patmore.' Gosse has also described his own impressions of the poet:

He was exceedingly unlike other people. But his face possessed quite as much beauty as strangeness. Three things were particularly noticeable in the head of Coventry Patmore—the vast convex brows, arched with vision; the bright, shrewd, blueish-grey eyes, the outer fold of one eyelid permanently and humorously drooping; and the wilful, sensuous mouth. These three seemed ever at war amongst themselves; they spoke three different tongues—they proclaimed a man of dreams, a canny man of business, and a man of vehement physical determination.

Aloof, autocratic, an arrogant mystic, yet a man capable of great understanding and tenderness, Coventry Patmore stands apart from the rest of the Victorian scene. Unlike other men, he cared little for the crowd. Yet much of his character belonged essentially to his time. Only a Victorian could have written *The Angel in the House*, with its philosophy of love set in that secure era of prosperous rural deans and beautiful girls who have little else to do but order the house and enjoy the pleasures of country society. This 'breviary for married lovers' is typical of the period, as is his fierce patriotism, his pride in having helped to found the Artist Rifles, and his life-long pre-occupation with social questions. Only a Victorian could have faced the verdict of posterity with so unflinching a certainty.

The following is the story and the background of a man who in his own phrase sought 'the great society of men, of Angels, and of God'.

CHAPTER TWO

The Beginning

TURNING to the back pages of the old Family Bible, I find that the story of my family begins under the shadow of St. Paul's. At the end of this worn-out and much-read Bible, where all the births, marriages and deaths of the Patmore family are recorded, the following event is noted down in the fine writing of the eighteenth century :

Maria Clarissa Stevens married Peter Patmore on the 21st August 1783 [her birthday] at St. Laurence Jury.

There is no record of Peter Patmore's parentage, although it is thought that the family originally came to London from a village of this name in Hertfordshire. His wife was the daughter of John Stevens and Maria Beackman. Maria Beackman was the sister of a German painter, some of whose work hangs in Hampton Court. Family tradition says that he had been a painter at the Court of Frederick the Great.

There is little record of their only son, Peter George Patmore's early life. His childhood appears to have been easy and untroubled. He grew up in a cultured and comfortable middle-class home, and as he was the only child, he was rather spoilt by his parents.

His mother, who was half-German and half-English, was an exceptional woman. She apparently possessed amazing energy, and she was keenly interested in the arts. She painted a little, and was an expert needlewoman. She dominated the lives of both her husband and her only son; and she lived for almost a century, witnessing in her lifetime the passing of the old order and the transformation of English life by the Industrial Revolution. Undoubtedly a woman of force and ambition, she saw her son make his entry into that exciting world of letters in

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which moved the figures of Leigh Hunt, Charles Lamb and Hazlitt. She witnessed his rise in the social world at a time when Society was still a jealously guarded circle. Finally, she saw the talents of her family reach their zenith in the person of her favourite grandson, Coventry. Her death was caused by a fall downstairs in her ninety-third year, and it is recorded with pride that even then her hair retained its natural colour, and her teeth were perfect.



There is little information about her husband, Peter Patmore. I imagine that he must have been a quiet reserved man, content to rest in the shadow of his brilliant and forceful wife. Without doubt he was a clever jeweller and silversmith, for his business appears to have prospered so well that his son had no need to work in it.

Much more is known about his son, Peter George Patmore. He has his little half-column in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and from 1825 to 1845 was one of the conspicuous writers in England. Making his literary debut at the age of twenty-one in *Blackwood's Magazine*, welcomed as a contributor

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to most of the great reviews, a reader and adviser to publishers such as Colburn, an intimate of Lamb and Hazlitt, an habitual guest of Lady Blessington, a dramatic critic and a dandy, P. G. Patmore occupied a position of considerable importance in the literary and social world of London.

The only existing portrait of this unusual man is a pen sketch, drawn by himself, which shows him in early manhood, wearing a very high cravat. The features are clear-cut, but an air of boredom and sadness seems to pervade the drawing. A man of ability and talent, he was born with an intensely introspective mind, almost of our time in its ceaseless preoccupation with self-analysis. Passionately devoted to literature, and himself a writer of quality, his later years were destined to be clouded with failure, and a career that began so glamorously ended in neglected obscurity.

The cause of his unpopularity was also his most considerable achievement. Towards the end of his life, in 1854, he published three volumes entitled *My Friends and Acquaintances*, consisting of memorials, mind-portraits and personal recollections of deceased nineteenth-century celebrities, with a selection from their unpublished letters. This book, which contained certain indiscretions, caused a great outcry in the literary press of the day, and gave him a bad name from which his reputation has never recovered.

Valéry Larbaud, who is the only well-known critic to realise the importance of Peter George Patmore in relation to his son, Coventry, defends this book by saying :

My Friends and Acquaintances is not only a collection of anecdotes about the world of letters in England from 1825 to 1845, but it is also a product of the period. . . . His faults are those of the Society of his day. He had raised himself to the level of Society, but he could not go beyond it: he perceived nothing above it . . . As a writer, Peter George Patmore is classed; he belongs to the Cockney School, of which the only great exponent was Charles Lamb. . . . His style is studied, like his personality, and full of dignity, like the dandies' cravats; but it is second-hand.

Peter George Patmore may have been a weak character, but as a man he is rather lovable. In the words of Valéry Larbaud :

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He had a fine and original taste; he had the courage to express his admiration for Shelley and Wordsworth at a period when these names were still mentioned with mockery and criticism. He was able to frequent men of genius, and see them intimately, with their faults and weaknesses, without forgetting their greatness. From this point of view, his portraits of Lamb and Hazlitt are excellent studies, and such that many biographers might take them as models.

Throughout his early life his mother dominated his ideas and his actions. She it was who encouraged him in his literary ambitions, and saved him from the unpleasant duty of entering his father's business. And when disaster threatened to overtake him at the age of twenty-five, owing to an unfortunate duelling affair, it was she who saved the situation by moulding his character after her own pattern and marrying him to the woman she had chosen as his wife.

Looking back, we can imagine him a lonely, sensitive and intelligent little boy, growing up amidst the bustling activity of the merchants on Ludgate Hill and Cheapside. Those were restless times. England was threatened by the Napoleonic Wars. New ideas and enthusiasms were in the air. At the age of seven he must have heard rumours of the French Revolution—that political cataclysm which had sent a shudder of apprehension through Europe.

As he grew to manhood, he felt the desire to escape from the commercial atmosphere in which his father lived. By nature fastidious, and carefully educated by his mother, he felt that he was meant for a fuller and richer life. The Regency was in full swing. Life was full of opportunities. The Prince Regent himself had broken down many of the old social barriers, and young Patmore, with his money and talents, was determined to make a career for himself.

His desire for an escape from his surroundings manifested itself in dandyism. Like Count D'Orsay, whom he was to meet in later life at Lady Blessington's, he felt drawn to this curious manifestation of masculine vanity. W. C. Hazlitt records somewhat spitefully that 'Peter George Patmore was at one time a dandy, and affected two sorts of nether garments—one pair for walking, and another for sitting down. He once sat down, with unhappy results, in the promenading pair.' Baud-

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laire supplies a definition of dandyism which Michael Sadleir quotes *apropos* of D'Orsay. This might be applied to Patmore, and explains much of his complicated character:

Dandyism makes its appearance at times of transition, when democracy is only half powerful, or when aristocracy is already tottering, but has not yet fallen. At such times a few men—*déclassé*, disgusted or merely bored—will sometimes play with the idea of founding a new brand of aristocracy, and one all the more difficult to destroy because it will be based on qualities and gifts which toil cannot acquire, nor money buy. Dandyism is the last gesture of the heroic in an age of decadence. . . . It is a setting sun, magnificent, but without warmth and full of melancholy.

All the family biographers disapprove of Peter George Patmore's early life. They find it frivolous, vain and superficial when seen in the light of the austere life led by his brilliant son, Coventry. But in reality he was a man of rare sensibility and culture, and his nature craved experiences of all kinds. His own life, despite its failings, prepared the path for that of his favourite son; and his chief title to fame is that, from the first, he recognised Coventry's genius, and devoted his later years to fostering his son's greater talent. 'Think of him with gratitude,' says Larbaud, 'for he gave our poet a happy childhood.'

But this is anticipation. Once fairly launched on his career as a young man of fashion, Patmore turned his attention to letters, and soon came to the fore as a contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*. It is something of a paradox that the literary circle which he found most congenial was the 'Cockney School', headed by Charles Lamb, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, and including Keats. This School was the object of *Maga's* most savage attacks, but no doubt part of Patmore's attraction for its members lay in the very fact that he belonged to the enemy's camp. It is certainly much to his credit that on finding that he admired and liked these men he dared to risk the displeasure of his employers by pursuing their friendship.

His diary, later published in *My Friends and Acquaintances*, shows that he was a frequent visitor to Lamb and other members of the School. An entry on July 13th, 1826, gives us a glimpse of this remarkable group:

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Spent the evening at Leigh Hunt's with the Lambs, Atherstone, Mrs. Shelley, and the Gliddons. Lamb talked admirably about Dryden, and some of the older poets—in particular of Davenant's *Gondibert*. Of this, Hunt wanted to show that it consisted almost entirely of monosyllables, which gives a most heavy and monotonous effect to the versification; and he read some passages to that effect. Lamb would not admit this, and he read an admirable passage in reply, about a Museum of Natural Curiosities in which Man, the pretended Lord of all the other creatures, hung by the wall, dry, like all the rest, and even Woman, the Lord of Man, hung there too—"and she dried by him".

The effect of the passage was prodigious. . . .

He [Lamb] spoke of Dryden as a prodigious person, so far as his wonderful power of versification went, but not a first-rate poet, or even capable of appreciating such—giving instances from his prefaces in proof of this. He spoke of Dryden's prefaces as the finest pieces of criticism, nevertheless, that had been written, and the better for being contradictory to each other, because not founded on any pretended rules.

When still a young man, Patmore wrote a book called *Letters on England*, under the pseudonym of Victoire, Comte de Soligny, in which he masqueraded as a young Frenchman giving his impressions of England. First published as articles in *The New Monthly Magazine*, these two volumes show that Patmore must have frequently visited France. They give an interesting picture of English life under the Regency, and are typical of his character at this time. In the guise of a young dandy playing at literature with languid disdain, he shows a mind deeply interested in art and letters, and a critical faculty that is alive and trenchant.

The young writer turns his back on Ludgate Hill and commerce:

In one word I hate London already! the filth of the streets, and the eternal din of the carts and coaches in them are execrable—the general aspect of the people you meet there—hard, heavy, coarse, vulgar, awkward—the antithesis of everything *spirituel*—their ungraceful and tasteless costume is execrable; the endless succession of plain dirty-looking bricks piled up for houses, with plain square holes for windows and doors, are

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execrable—to me—who loathe commerce in its beginning and its end, its objects and its effects—the shops, superb as some of them are—are execrable; and above all the atmosphere (for London has one of its own) is execrable. . . .

A visit to Brighton in 1817 hardly pleases him any better. Describing life in a fashionable boarding-house he writes:

Perhaps I cannot give you a better idea of the private amusements of the English people, than by placing you amongst them here. . . . The usual hour of rising is about nine. Perhaps an hour or two before this, two or three of the party—young ladies more new to the place than the rest, and glad of an opportunity of looking about them unchecked by the argus eyes of their mammas or aunts—will stroll to the seashore, and dip their fingers into the water to taste 'how salt it is', or try how near they can put their not very pretty feet to the little waves that come rippling over each other, without being caught by them: or wonder at the ocean, and confess that 'it is not near so large as they thought it was!' About nine—they return—seldom without trophies of their enterprise—such as, a 'curious' stone with a hole in it, a dry star-fish, or a long wet seaweed dangling at their fingers' end.

By this time the rest of the company begin to drop in, in parties of three or four, to the public eating-room, where breakfast is prepared of tea, coffee, eggs, etc.

This lasts about an hour; during the course of which each seldom fails to inform all the rest who are within speaking distance that 'it's a fine' or 'a dull morning'; as if each wanted the faculty to find out. This generally forms the sum and substance of the conversation during breakfast; after which the females retire. Some of them go to their chambers to read for an hour or two. . . . Others sit down to a piano there is in the public sitting-room, and amuse themselves by playing and singing . . . others are walking on the seashore to pick up shells, or, if the weather is favourable, taking a dip in the sea. . . . All this fills up the time till about three; when they return and dress for dinner, which takes place about half-past four. This is the only meal at which the English eat; and the wonder is that, with their execrable cooking, they can eat at all . . . the females leave the room a short time after it is over. The men remain about an hour; when most of the party assemble in the drawing-room, and the mistress of the house prepares tea. . . . It is by

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this time eight o'clock. Most of the party now go to a public walk where all the visitors of the town assemble. Their evident objects in this are to see and be seen; but as you'll perceive from the time (eight o'clock in September) they contrive that it shall be exactly too late for either of these purposes. This, however, they don't seem to be aware of, but very innocently walk backwards and forwards for an hour in the dark, and then go to one or other of the public libraries. To return to our party, those who do not spend their evening in wandering about to one or other of these libraries (for there are three) have perhaps been sitting at home at a green table with their eyes fixed on certain papers covered with black and red spots—their brows contracted into a wise frown—their minds on the stretch, and their mouths closed in a profound silence for three hours—only occasionally interrupted by mutual recriminations, provided they happen to be good friends enough to be warranted in abusing each other—and this they call playing at whist! About half-past-ten they drop in, to a cold supper—and by about half-past-eleven the whole party have generally retired to bed to dream of the pleasures of the past day, or anticipating those of to-morrow. . . .

And as he writes, his mind goes back to happy days spent in France. How elegant and how infinitely more subtle is life over there! He recalls:

A single sunshiny fête day at St. Cloud—with the booths, the games and the water-works; the children sporting about everywhere—the young men and maids wandering in pairs among the trees—the middle-aged and old occupying the walks, or seated in groups on chairs, quietly enjoying the happiness that breathes, looks and speaks in everything about them; and above all, the finish of the whole day by the music and dancing at night: a single day such as this, embodies more real pleasure—calls forth more heart—cherishes more complacent feelings towards our fellow-beings—tends more to invigorate and fit the mind for the duties of daily life—in short, fulfils to more effect the end for which we live in this beautiful world, than all the gloomy gaiety that such a place as this produces in an age—Sundays included: of which last I shall have more to tell you hereafter.

However, Patmore's life at this period is not all frivolity, and

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in his letters he is quick to appreciate the importance of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

He was an enthusiastic lover of the theatre, and acted as dramatic critic for several of the papers, to which he contributed regular articles. Together with his friend Hazlitt, also an ardent theatre-goer, he was rapturous over Edmund Kean's art. Of his performance as Macbeth, he writes :

His characteristic is passion—passion under all its names and varieties—through all its windings and blendings—in all its delicate shades and most secret recesses. . . . Passion seems to be the very breath of his mental existence, or rather its vital stream, into which everything else resolves itself. If he has to express love, his whole soul seems to cling to the being on whom he is gazing—his voice melts—his eye swims and trembles, and the words fall from his lips as if *they* were the smallest part of what he would express. And in all this there is no show—no endeavour—no pretence: for real love is the most unpretending thing in the world—the most quiet—the most able to repose upon itself, and the most willing to do so

This ceaseless preoccupation with the analysis of love is typical of all Patmore's work, and it will be seen that his son Coventry inherited this characteristic to an intense degree. Just as Coventry's first poems dealt with love, so Peter George tells us that his earliest writings had for their object the illustration of the birth, growth and gradual development of love. These were published in *The New Monthly Magazine*, then under the editorship of Thomas Campbell. By the narration of brief passages in the (supposed) life of the writer, they were designed to show that at one period of our lives the passion is a purely intellectual one uninfluenced by feelings of sex: so the first story was about two schoolboys of nine and ten years of age, one of whom 'wasted the sweetness' of his nascent affection on 'the desert air' to receive only the other's 'utter indifference and disdain'. Thomas Campbell refused this contribution on the grounds that many persons, through ignorance, prejudice, or ill-nature, might object to the description of such an attachment; but he accepted the next which, as Patmore remarks, was 'a love story quite *selon les règles*, so far as the relations of sex were concerned. . . .'

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And so passed the happy carefree days of Peter George Patmore's early manhood—a dandy in St. James's, and a man of letters in Fleet Street.

The following letter, hitherto unpublished, and written to his friend John Scott, the editor of *The London Magazine*, shows the influence of Charles Lamb:

My dear Scott,

I shall not fail to be with you on Wednesday unless I should be obliged to go into the country on particular business—if this should happen—and I'm not without my fears that it may—I shall let you know that you may not come to meet me.

I have presented your compliments to my steed—but being (as it seems to me) rather *over*-modest, if not prudish, in her deportment she didn't receive them so favourably as might have been expected. She seemed to think it was scarcely permitted to feminine delicacy to receive the compliments of a gentleman to whom she had not yet been introduced. And besides, for she prides herself (how justly I don't pretend to say) on being a steed of some penetration—she seemed to construe your politeness into a prospective attempt to *curry* favour with her when you *do* see her, and this she desires me to say will be totally unavailing—for she protests that if ever I should prove faithless to her (and to say the truth I have given some distant hints of my having it in contemplation to part with her for a short time—which she has taken very much to heart) I say she protests that since she has been under my *protection*, the uniform kindness and attention she has received from me has been such that she has made up her mind never to place herself under the control of any other lord and master—in short never to have any communication whatever with *men*-kind, except as it relates to those who are appointed to attend upon her—and that if—contrary to all my protestations on the subject—she *is* obliged to leave me for a short time she is determined that she will only go with some respectable family as 'companion to a lady'. On my assuring her that my offence—(for she insists that the mere thought of parting from *her* is an offence) 'hath this extent—*no more*'—she seemed a little easier—and under these circumstances she has no objection to meet you on Kew Bridge at *noon* on Wednesday—If it should rain, however, you must not expect us till dinner time.

Always yours,
P. Geo. Patmore.

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Such were the beginnings of his literary career, set against the changing background of Regency London. He visits prize-fights with Hazlitt, he carries on artificial flirtations in Vauxhall Gardens, he parades his exquisite clothes in the Mall, and like all fashionable young men, he frequents the salons of smart lady novelists such as Mrs. Charles Gore.

In more serious moments, he argues about literature with Lamb, Hazlitt and other members of the Cockney School, in the coffee-houses in Southampton Street. He listens to concerts in white and gold Assembly Rooms, where he hears 'the divinely human voice of Miss Stephens breathing forth a simple Scottish melody, or the unearthly sweetness of Mrs. Salmon's singing, clinging with "reluctant amorous delay" round an air of Haydn or Mozart', happily oblivious that he is soon to be swept into literary feuds and quarrels from which his weak but charming personality can afford him no protection.

In fact, through his friendship with Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and Lamb, he was destined to be one of the many lesser victims whose reputations were destroyed by the implacable enmity of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

CHAPTER THREE

Peter George Patmore and William Hazlitt

After Mr. Patmore was gone, Northcote said he was one of the persons of soundest judgment he had ever known, and like Mr. Prince Hoare the least liable to be imposed on by circumstances.

Hazlitt in *Conversations with Northcote*.

FRIENDSHIP was an essential part of Peter George Patmore's life—it was an art in which he excelled. His affectionate nature craved the understanding and sympathy of others, and his quick sensibility and almost feminine intuition made him an admirable and loyal friend.

His long friendship with Hazlitt is an outstanding example of this side of his character. Curiously enough, this important friendship provides a striking parallel between father and son. As Peter George Patmore was content to follow and admire the genius of his friend, Hazlitt, so his son Coventry Patmore was also happy, in his young days, to sit at the feet of Tennyson.

Past biographers and his contemporaries have not been kind to Peter George Patmore, and recently a new biographer of Hazlitt, Miss Catherine Macdonald Maclean in *Born under Saturn** has a veritable field-day at his expense. Passionately in love with her subject, Miss Maclean had to find a villain for her study and has picked Peter George Patmore for the role. According to this lady, 'Patmore shabbied everything he touched on, in literature as in life'; 'Patmore, who preened himself on his success with women and on his understanding of them, professed himself learned in the mysteries of love'; 'his sympathy was not real sympathy, but merely an extension of his egoism.'

But viewed objectively, it is difficult to discover the reasons

**Born Under Saturn. A Biography of William Hazlitt* by Catherine Macdonald Maclean. (Collins. 1943.)

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for all this enmity. A study of his life will show that Peter George Patmore was an affectionate father, a good husband, and a man who really loved and appreciated letters. However, I think that much of the past enmity can be accounted for by the fact that as Hazlitt and his friends were attacked and abused by *Blackwood's* and *The Quarterly* for political reasons, so in a lesser degree this hatred was concentrated on Patmore for being their friend and intimate.

Admittedly, he was indiscreet at times, but he was a loyal and affectionate friend, as is witnessed by the many letters addressed to him by his more illustrious contemporaries. Far from being a *Don Juan*, he seems to have been happier in the company of men, and it was his quick discernment of the genius in others that made him a loyal friend to Hazlitt. Why else should he have stood by Hazlitt when it would have been easier and more profitable to have gone over to the side of the enemy?

He moved in a brilliant intellectual world gratefully listening to the conversation of Charles Lamb, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt. Eager to please, he was also quick to appreciate the greatness of some of his friends before the rest of the world recognised it. A man of means in a set where poverty was the rule, he continually entertained his less fortunate friends. Indiscriminate as his praise sometimes was, he has left posterity several deft sketches of his life and times.* His faults may have been many: he was vain and rather a snob—both very human failings: yet he could draw such tributes as the words Charles Ollier wrote to Coventry Patmore in later years:

Your father was a good man—manly, straightforward, honest, truthful, friendly . . . a person of rare intellectual endowments and a companion in whose society it was impossible to pass a dull hour.

Patmore first met William Hazlitt, when, as Secretary of the 'Surrey Institution', he invited the famous essayist to deliver a course of lectures in the theatre of the Club. The interview, which lasted but a few minutes, is described by Patmore:

On entering (the room where Hazlitt was already waiting),

*See *My Friends and Acquaintances*. Three volumes. Saunders and Otley, 1854.

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I saw a pale anatomy of a man, sitting uneasily, half on a chair, with his legs tucked awkwardly underneath the rail, his hands folded listlessly on his knees, his head drooping on one side, and one of his elbows leaning (not resting) on the edge of the table, by which he sat, as if in fear of its having no right to be there. His hat had taken an odd position on the floor beside him, as if that, too, felt itself as much out of its element as its owner. He half rose at my entrance, and without speaking a word, or looking at me, except with a momentary and furtive glance, he sat down again, in a more uneasy position than before, and seemed to wait the result of what I might say to him with the same sort of desperate indifference with which a culprit may be supposed to wait the sentence of his judge, after conviction. He was to learn from me whether his proffered services as a lecturer were accepted or rejected: and to a man of his habits and temperament, and under his circumstances, either alternative took the shape of an intolerable penalty—like those to Romeo, of 'Death' or 'Banishment'. If the lectures he proposed to deliver were rejected, he probably did not know where to meet the claims of to-morrow. On the other hand, if they were accepted, his condition was still more trying: for I learned from him that not a line of the lectures were written, nor even their materials prepared; they had been merely *thought of*.

However, it was arranged that he should lecture on the Comic Writers, and the interview was the beginning of an acquaintance that eventually led to intimate friendship.

At this period, the years 1818-19, Hazlitt was smarting under the virulent attacks of the literary press. Surely in no age of literature has criticism been so mean, petty and scurrilous as that of *The Quarterly* and *Blackwood's* at this time. With diabolical insight, *Maga* had found out the really vulnerable spot in Hazlitt's character—his morbid obsession with his own physical unattractiveness. Not content with attacking his writings, they attacked his person, and labelled him 'pimpled Hazlitt'. These onslaughts so preyed on his over-sensitive mind that he scarcely dared to go near his favourite resorts lest he should see, or fancy that he saw the judgment of *The Quarterly* or *Blackwood's Magazine* expressed in the face on which he went to gaze in silent or in eloquent admiration.

Here is Patmore's account of the matter:

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Because he was (with perhaps no exception whatever among men of first-rate talent at the time I speak of) the only man who dared to hold by and express in plain and uncompromising terms those political sentiments and opinions which, at the early part of the first French Revolution, he had adopted in common with almost all the intellectual men of the day—his friends, teachers, and seniors—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, etc.; because, holding by these opinions to the last, in spite of their ill-success and the politic putting of them off by those who helped to instil them into him, he dared to express them in terms, if stronger, yet not more violent than those in which the world expresses them now that they can keep each other in countenance; because of this, we see him put out of the pale of critical and social courtesy, denounced as an outlaw, not entitled to the usages of civilised warfare, and only to be hunted down as a savage or wild beast

In pursuance of this latter plan, for instance, precisely because he was the most original thinker of his day, we heard him held up as a mere waiter upon the intellectual wealth of his literary acquaintance, and a mere sucker of the brains of Charles Lamb and Coleridge. Precisely because his face was pale and clear as marble, we saw him pointed at as 'the pimpled Hazlitt'. Precisely because he never tasted anything but water, we saw him held up as a habitual gin-drinker and a sot!

At this time, Patmore was a regular contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, although he quarrelled with them later on; and with commendable modesty he gives this as the reason why Hazlitt was first interested in him.

A day or two before Hazlitt was to deliver the first of his lectures on the Comic Writers, Patmore wrote him a note saying that he proposed to print a critical notice of the lectures in *Blackwood's*, and asking him for such facilities as he might choose to give him. Hazlitt's reply was an invitation to his house in York Street, Westminster.

Patmore writes:

I went to him in York Street in consequence of the note. On knocking at the door, it was, after a long interval, opened by a sufficiently 'neat-handed' domestic. The outer door led immediately from the street into an empty apartment, indicating an uninhabited house, and I supposed I had mistaken the number;

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but on asking for the object of my search, I was shown to a door which opened on to a ladder-like staircase, bare like the rest, which led to a dark landing place, and thence to a large square wainscoted apartment. The great curtainless windows in this room looked upon some dying trees; the whole of the wall, over and above the chimney-piece, was entirely covered up to the ceiling, by names written in pencil, of all sizes and characters, commemorative of visits of curiosity to 'the house of Pindar'.

The house had been Milton's, and at this time belonged to Jeremy Bentham.

There was, near to the empty fireplace, a table with breakfast things upon it (though it was two o'clock in the afternoon); three chairs and a sofa were standing about the room, and one unbound book lay on the mantelpiece. At the table sat Hazlitt, on the sofa a lady, whom I found to be his wife. My reception was not very inviting, and it struck me at once (what had not occurred to me before) that in asking facilities for criticising William Hazlitt in *Blackwood's Magazine* I had taken a step open to suspicion of either mischief or mystification or both. However, I soon satisfied him that my object and design were anything but unfriendly. To be what he called 'puffed' in so unlooked-for a quarter was evidently deemed a godsend; it put him in excellent humour accordingly; and the 'Lake Poets' being mentioned, and finding me something of a novice in such matters (moreover an excellent listener) he talked for a couple of hours, without intermission.

Hazlitt's first lecture was a success, and the new acquaintances walked away together from the Institution to York Street. Patmore gives an amusing description of the journey home:

In my innocence, I actually offered him my arm, *which he took*, and so we walked, arm-in-arm, through the whole of Fleet Street, the Strand, Parliament Street, etc

The general reader will wonder at what there was extraordinary in this, but the initiated will believe the marvel. But to walk straight home at ten o'clock at night 'in a respectable and gentlemanlike manner'. It cannot have been! Arm-in-arm, too, with a very young gentleman in a point device costume! I think I hear Charles Lamb exclaim, 'Why the Angel Gabriel could not have persuaded Hazlitt to walk arm-in-arm with him for half the length of Southampton Buildings'. Per-

Peter George Patmore and William Hazlitt

haps not—but with a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine* it was different: one too who had tacitly engaged to give a favourable account of him in that terror and bugbear of his coterie. The chance was not to be thrown away; for Hazlitt, with all his boasted nonconformity, piqued himself on his prudence and world-wisdom when he thought the occasion of sufficient moment to his personal comfort to call for these.

Hazlitt afterwards considered this course of lectures one of 'the best jobs' he ever had. Besides the money he received for them—which incidentally, Patmore arranged to be paid to him in advance at his earnest request—he also sold the copyright of them for a handsome price. And finally, Patmore had 'not merely kept his lectures from being abused in *Blackwood's*' but had praised them there to the full amount of his expectations.'

But friendship with Hazlitt was no easy matter. A few months later Patmore was surprised to find himself roughly handled in *The London Magazine*. He was accused of using a phrase of Hazlitt's in an article, and was attacked with all the virulence and invective at Hazlitt's command.

As Patmore's plagiarism had been of the mildest form, he felt bewildered by Hazlitt's onslaught. 'Being totally unconscious of any other cause of offence,' he records, 'I confess that the savage manner in which he made his reprisals both shocked and disgusted me; and so matters rested between us for a considerable time.'

The explanation turned out to be that Hazlitt thought Patmore had cut him in the street.

Soon afterwards a reconciliation was brought about by John Scott.

Briefly [says Patmore] it was settled that we should dine with Scott the same day, if Hazlitt did not object; and accordingly we met as if nothing had happened . . . and the rest of the day (and night) was spent in talk such as I scarcely remember to have enjoyed either before or since!

Thenceforward, Patmore and Hazlitt met almost every day, and

although our intercourse was wholly free from conventional

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restraint, neither of us disguising or concealing an opinion or sentiment in deference to those of the other, our intimacy was never broken, or even jarred or disturbed, from the above-named period to that of his death—an interval of more than twelve years.

It was during this long friendship that Patmore became the recipient of the letters Hazlitt wrote about his hopeless passion for his landlady's daughter, Sarah Walker.

Hazlitt met her for the first time during the August of 1820. She was the second daughter of the landlady of his new lodgings in Southampton Buildings. He fell madly in love with her. Sarah Walker, in her turn, was too young and inexperienced to cope with the violent passions she had aroused. A somewhat heartless, flirtatious girl, only just nineteen, who was accustomed to protect herself against the love-making of her mother's lodgers, she merely played with the essayist's passionate devotion. Miss Maclean wisely remarks that 'she was largely what circumstances had made her, and considering her circumstances, we do not think she was much to blame for her methods of self-defence, although for him they were ruinous'.

After months of agonised love-making, Hazlitt went off to Scotland to see if he could arrange a divorce from his wife. It was during these days of separation from his adored Sarah that Hazlitt turned to his friend Patmore as a confidant.

Patmore was then living at No. 12 Greek Street, Soho, and Hazlitt implored him to send news of Miss Walker. In an amazing correspondence he poured out all his innermost emotions about Sarah. He begged Patmore to call at Southampton Buildings and discover if Sarah really loved him. He tormented himself with doubts and self-accusations. He suspected Sarah of having other lovers, and asked his friend to reassure him that these fears were false.

After the unfortunate affair had ended, and Hazlitt had realised that he had been deceived in Sarah, he published in 1823 all these letters to Patmore and Sheridan Knowles, another intimate friend, under the title, *Liber Amoris, or The New Pygmalion*.

My great-great-grandfather has often been abused for his associations with the 'wretched book', as so many critics have

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called it. Perhaps he should have tried to restrain Hazlitt from publishing it. But he was young and he admired his friend, and Hazlitt was notoriously difficult and headstrong. If the *Liber Amoris* is considered in a dispassionate light, it will be seen that it deserves more pity than condemnation. This book, that shocked generations of English critics, is in reality nothing more than the pathetic testimony of genius in the throes of a frustrated love.

In 1822 the two friends set out on a tour of country houses containing famous collections of pictures. Both were keenly interested in painting, and amongst the houses they visited was Burleigh House, one of the seats of the Cecil family. They also stayed at Fonthill Abbey.

Fonthill Abbey was still the subject of the greatest public curiosity, and after long years of mystery and rumours under the rule of its brilliant but eccentric creator, William Beckford, it had just been thrown open to the public by its new owner. Patmore's description of Hazlitt at Fonthill gives such a charmingly human and little-known side of him that it is worth printing in full :

It was during this stay at Fonthill Abbey that I had occasion to remark one among other instances in Hazlitt, of that peculiarity which he himself so often observed and smiled at in Charles Lamb—unconscious I believe, that it existed in at least an equal degree in himself, though modified by another feature in his personal character. Whenever he showed special signs of favour towards anyone in a menial stage of life, it was sure to be some out-of-the-way being, who was the laughing stock, or the pity, of everyone else; and amongst the people of the late immense establishment of Mr. Beckford who had been retained in the service of the new proprietor of the place (Mr. Farquhar) was a lout of a footboy, who was in special favour with Hazlitt. He had recently been promoted from the plough-tail to the servants' hall, and had been appointed to take up Hazlitt's breakfast to his room in the morning, and to give him any information he might need connected with the object of his visit to the place—which was similar to mine.

Now, a personal civility to Hazlitt won his heart at once; and in the case of menial servants he always took care to lay the foundations for this (when he could afford to do so) by a liberal gratuity *beforehand*. And he had done this in Tom's case so

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effectually that the lad took him for nothing less than a lord in disguise, and treated him accordingly. At the same time Tom perceived, by a sort of instinct, that his benefactor was in fact not much more lordly or urbane in his mere 'complement external' than he himself was, and thereupon assumed a most lacquey-like superiority over him, in virtue of the information which he (Tom) possessed and the other party wanted. He used to direct Hazlitt to the various localities of the neighbourhood; show him about the grounds; and in one or two instances, I remember, ventured to go to the forbidden length of naming the name of the late Lord of the Abbey. Among other things, he told Hazlitt that he had *once* (during an almost life-long servitude on the spot!) actually caught a sight of the visible presence of the said mysterious being, who, in his solitary wanderings about the grounds of the Abbey, having encountered the unlucky apparition of Tom in those sacred precincts where he had no business, instead of ordering his instant dismissal from the service (which was the understood rule in such cases) in his infinite magnanimity merely desired him to 'get out of the way'.

The change which had come over the spirit of Tom since the downfall at the Abbey of this more than Eastern mystery and despotism, had worked an amusing alteration in him, the outward effects of which it was that took Hazlitt's fancy; and he used to take every opportunity that offered of talking with him on subjects connected with the late and present state of the place. While Tom, on his part, thus elevated to a companionship with 'gentlefolks', and seeing those spots which had changed (nobody could tell why) into a bear-garden and a public thoroughfare, was so completely mystified and moved from his propriety as to have become, for the nonce, a 'character' well worth observation and study.

One great practical point in Tom's favour with Hazlitt, I remember, was that he used, by hook or by crook, to procure him an inordinate quantity of cream for his breakfast and tea; and in order to excuse himself from any improper imputation on his honesty in the affair, he used to confess, or rather to boast, with great *naïveté*, that all 'that sort of thing' was now the understood privilege and 'parquiset' of the establishment. 'Lord bless'ee, zur, we all does it now, since Nabob 'a been gone away, and nobody b'nt the worse nur the wiser for it. Muster Phillips* is master now, and we does just as we likes' In fact, what

*The auctioneer under whose direction the property was being prepared for the public sale which shortly afterwards took place.

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Hazlitt admired in Tom was the simple honesty of his roguery. There was nothing Tom would not have done for him—such as stealing the best fruit from the hot-houses—driving him round the grounds etc.—excusing it all with a ‘Lord bless’ee, zur, there’s ho harm in it—nobody won’t know nothin’ about it’! The only immorality, in Tom’s eyes, was to be found out.

A few years later, Patmore was among the friends who subscribed towards the expenses of Hazlitt’s last illness, and he was one of the few who stood beside the grave during the burial of this unfortunate man.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Duel

ON a clear moonlit night in February, in the year 1821, four literary gentlemen met to settle an affair of honour. All four men were a trifle nervous. They were not used to duelling. Although it was nine o'clock in the evening the field near Chalk Farm in which they met stood out in sharp relief and the bare winter trees gleamed darkly against the sky.

The two seconds fussed nervously round the principals and secretly wished that they had left this question of maintaining one's honour to the dashing gentlemen round the Prince Regent. Now it was too late. This was to be a duel between two literary Magazines. John Scott, the editor of the *The London Magazine* was meeting Mr. Christie, the friend and representative of John Gibson Lockhart, the editor of *Blackwood's Magazine*. Years of inveterate enmity had flared up into this meeting—a pathetic farce that was to end in tragedy.

All four gentlemen were determined to behave with the utmost chivalry. Mr. Trail was acting as second for Mr. Christie, and Mr. P. G. Patmore was acting for Mr. Scott.

The moon was shining brightly, and when the principals had been placed, Mr. Christie found that he had an advantage in seeing Mr. Scott's head above the horizon. He chivalrously warned Mr. Scott and caused the position to be changed, and then, the signal being given, fired in the air.

At this point the duel should have ended, but the two seconds lost their heads and, as later evidence testified, the following events took place:

After the pistols were reloaded, and everything ready for a second fire, Mr. Trail called out—"Now, Mr. Christie, take your aim, and do not throw away your advantage as you did

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last time' In the meantime, John Scott called—'What, did not Mr. Christie fire at me?' To which Mr. Patmore answered, 'You must not speak. You have nothing for it but firing.'

Scott was fatally wounded this time, and died ten days later. Peter George Patmore was overcome with grief at his friend's death. The day after the duel he wrote to his mother:

My dear Mother,

The affair of my friend Scott has (I have the strongest reason to fear) terminated fatally. We went out yesterday evening, and he is wounded desperately. There is barely a hope for his life. If he dies, I lose the dearest friend I ever had among men. My sorrow and affliction are more than it is possible to express. All things that ever happened to me before are nothing compared with this last fatal misfortune.

. . . For the first time in my life, I confess that Fate, or Fortune, or whatever it may be, has been too strong for me. It is as much—it is almost more than I can do—to struggle against. But I must and will.

The events of the one evening changed Peter George Patmore's life. Gone forever were the carefree dilettante days of his youth. His attempts at being a man of fashion and a sportsman had ended in this tragic farce.

A storm of protest from the public broke out when Scott died ten days later. An inquest followed and Peter George Patmore was forced to leave the country for a while. He took refuge in Calais and hid there under the pseudonyms of 'P. G. Pitt' and 'P. G. Preston'. He was compelled to do this, because apparently, had the court recorded a verdict of manslaughter against him, he would have had to forfeit all his property as well as his personal freedom.

The trial resulted in the acquittal of the other principal—Christie—and the two seconds, and all fear of legal punishment was removed. The scandal, however, pursued Peter George Patmore all through his life. So violent was contemporary opinion about the results of this unfortunate duel, that Miss Mitford could write:

John Scott is now the victim of his own contemptible second, a man who is a pawnbroker on Ludgate Hill, and a dandy in

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St. James' Street and who egged on his unhappy friend to gratify his own trumpery desire for popularity. I hope he will be severely dealt with.

and years later Browning heard a friend speak of Patmore as 'that bloody-minded man'.

Actually, the court cleared Patmore of all blame in the affair, and even John Scott's widow remained his devoted friend. Ironically, he was to suffer all his life for a crime he had not committed.

The shock of the duel gave his mother, Clarissa Patmore, the chance she had been awaiting. For some time past, she had had a young Scotch lady, Miss Eliza Robertson, living with her as a companion. This young lady, who also possessed a moderate fortune, had been marked out as the suitable bride for her only son. But until the trouble after the duel, Peter George Patmore had displayed a marked indifference to her and marriage in general.

Clarissa Patmore was, undoubtedly, a charming and clever woman and devoted to her son; but I fancy that there must have been a considerable conspiracy afoot to trap her son into matrimony, for I find that even the widow of the unfortunate John Scott writes to him, at Calais, as follows:

I have just come from seeing your Mother and Miss Robertson—I found them both at home to-day—the former looking better than when I saw her before—the latter looking delicate but very sweetly. She is indeed a charming girl—is it possible that you do not love her? I cannot believe it possible that two persons like yourselves, should live so much together and be insensible to each other—it is quite against my creed.

And in another letter Mrs. Scott writes:

I would wish to know more of the lady whom it gives me pleasure to think you love, in spite of what you say to the contrary—yet how am I to know more of her, if I may not go to see your Mother?

The plot worked. We find the young dandy and man of letters gradually learning to appreciate the charms of the young lady living in his home. In her honour he composes

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sonnets and verses in the Petrarchian manner, but tinged (as the official biographers remark) 'with Byronic melancholy'.

Under the dominant influence of his mother he begins to reform. He no longer goes to prize-fights. His elegant clothes become a trifle less foppish and he no longer fancies himself a 'lady-killer'.

The following year, 1822, witnesses the marriage of the young couple, and from that time on Peter George Patmore settles down to be the model husband and the father of four children.

I find that there is little recorded about Eliza Patmore. Only one of her letters to her husband survives. It is so brief and noncommittal that I think it worth quoting:

Dear George,

[1824]

This has this moment arrived. I do not know what to do about the check—I think I won't enclose it, as you will get some money of Colbourn

Baby [Coventry] is quite well.

Your affectionate,

Eliza Patmore.

Tuesday morning.

Will you bring Rabbit and Brandy and the things Mrs. Dod is to purchase for me?

The young married couple had rooms in a house in Southampton Street, Fitzroy Square, where Mrs. Dod was the landlady. They also spent a great deal of their time at Peter George's uncle's house at Woodford, in Essex.

In later years, Coventry Patmore talked little of his mother. Mr. Basil Champneys records that she was handsome, tall and stately. She cared little for the literary work of her husband and her eldest son. Outwardly she was cold in manner and somewhat stern and authoritative with all her children. She was a rigid Presbyterian, and she undoubtedly influenced the religious ideas of her son, although her husband did not allow her to instruct her children in her own creed.

There is only one portrait of her in existence—a drawing made after her death by Holman Hunt. It shows a fine countenance with features regular and strong.

The stage is set, the background painted, and the chief protagonist of this story now enters the scene.

CHAPTER FIVE

Boyhood of Coventry Patmore

NO biographer has ever explained why Peter George Patmore called his eldest son, Coventry. However, there is an old silver christening cup still in the possession of my family on which the inscription is: 'Presented by The Hon. Mrs. Coventry to C. K. Patmore', and this inclines me to suppose that the lady was godmother to the boy, and that Peter George Patmore gave him this unusual Christian name in her honour, when he was born at Woodford, Essex, on July 23rd, 1823.

Coventry Patmore's boyhood was very happy. His father adored him. Clarissa Patmore, his grandmother, did her best to spoil him and even make him conceited. His youth was spent between his parents' two homes. They now had a country house at Highwood Hill, several miles beyond Hendon, as well as the apartment in Southampton Street, Fitzroy Square. From his earliest years, the son became the constant companion and literary pupil of his father. He was a precocious little boy, and Peter George was quick to appreciate his unusual gifts.

Enchanted days were passed in his father's library and at his grandmother's home in the country. He loved to sit by her side and listen to her stories of the past century—stories about the Gordon Riots, of which she had been an eye-witness; tales of the agitating times when the name of Napoleon struck terror into every English home, and anecdotes perhaps of the Court of Prussia, where her uncle had worked as a painter.

At other times, they would sit quietly together and she would teach him to read and write. He used to tell his friends in later life that the first words his grandmother taught him to say were 'Coventry is a clever fellow'.

Even as a young child he was allowed to ramble freely about the countryside around his family's country home. He preferred these solitary wanderings when he could be alone with Nature. With the ecstatic vision of childhood 'he felt the living

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beauty of a field of buttercups, or the pure joy expressed by a field of daisies on the lawn, or the jewel-like brilliancy of ripe red currants in the evening sunlight.'

Back in London, the young boy was constantly to be found in his father's library. As soon as he learned to read he is reported to have shown a precocious love of letters, and as Peter George always surrounded himself with books this passion was eagerly gratified. Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton were read and re-read thoroughly at an early age, and if in the course of his studies the young student did not understand any point he immediately ran to his father for an explanation.

Mr. Basil Champneys notes 'how at one time the boy showed considerable talent for mathematics, and his father seems, not very wisely, to have made exhibitions to his friends of the child's proficiency'. Coventry would be called down to the drawing-room, his father's friends would ask him questions of some difficulty. He would then retire into a corner of the room to reflect. The small boy would bury his head in his hands and then return to the questioner with the answer ready.

Unlike so many English fathers, Peter George Patmore was more than ready to appreciate and guide the unusual gifts of his son, and for that reason alone his memory should be honoured. How rare to find a father who, on discovering that his eldest son wishes to be a poet, does all in his power to further his ambition!

Peter George Patmore was an enthusiastic theatre-goer, despite the fact that he had been a dramatic critic, and often took the young Coventry to the play. These occasions made a lasting impression on the young poet's mind. Edmund Kean as 'Othello' and 'Macbeth', Macready and Rachel—he saw them all. So great was his admiration for Rachel, that in old age, he refused to go and see Eleanora Duse for fear she might destroy his youthful idea of Rachel as the world's greatest *tragédienne*.

When he was only five or six years old, his parents took him by coach to Hastings, and the visit made a profound impression on him. 'As when in childhood, turning a dim street I first beheld the ocean,' from that moment he was infatuated with the seaside, and for ever afterwards the little town of Hastings held an irresistible fascination for him.

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In the days of his first visit, Hastings was an elegant watering-place which was beginning to rival the more popular Brighton. A few years later, King William IV was to set the seal of his royal approval on the charming old town by staying there regularly.

It was during this visit, also, that the young poet, so records his younger brother Gurney, passed 'The Mansion House', an old Queen Anne house hidden by a giant magnolia tree, and made up his mind that he would live there when he grew to be a man. Years after, in 1875, he carried out his resolve, and made this old mansion his home for over sixteen years. His brother quotes this anecdote as one of the many instances in which Coventry Patmore realised his ambitions by sheer tenacity of purpose.

Peter George had long ago recovered his position in the salons of the day. He was fortunate in his friends and they all stood by him in spite of his troubles and failings. Coventry was often taken to these gatherings by his affectionate and doting father, and at an early age he moved in some of the most brilliant literary circles of the period. One of the houses to which he was frequently taken was the Basil Montagu's in Bedford Square.* The Montagu salon was the meeting place of Hazlitt, James Smith and Barry Cornwall, and Haydon the painter. The young boy would sit shyly in a corner of the great drawing-room dutifully listening to the gay-hearted conversation of his elders. For this was the age of brilliant conversation, when epigrams were on everyone's lips and talk was erudite and witty.

In after years, Coventry always remembered Mrs. Basil Montagu. He used to say that she nearly always wore black velvet and lace, knowing that these suited her best, and in his memoir of Barry Cornwall, written years later, he noted:

Even at a time when her great personal beauty was slightly (it was never more than slightly) obscured by age, there was that about her which no well-disposed and imaginative young man could long behold without feeling that he was thereby committed to leading a worthy life.

*Basil Montagu (1770-1851), legal and miscellaneous writer, and patron of literature, was the second (natural) son of the fourth Earl of Sandwich.

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The Bryan Waller Procters (Barry Cornwall was a pseudonym) were another couple whose house he visited with his father, and whom he retained as lifelong friends. Barry Cornwall was at the height of his fame, his drama in verse, *Mirandola*, being extravagantly admired by his contemporaries, including Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt.

The dazzling new Countess of Blessington was then the talk of the town, and undoubtedly the young poet heard innumerable anecdotes about this almost legendary figure. His father has left a vivid description of her house in Paris, where he describes her fabulous *chambre-à-coucher* with 'the bed which stood as usual in recess, resting upon the backs of two exquisitely carved silver swans, every feather being carved in relief. The recess was lined throughout with white fluted silk bordered with blue embossed lace, and the frieze of the recess being hung with curtains of pale blue silk lined with white satin.'

How excited the imaginative boy must have been as he walked beside his father through this glamorous London! Did he visit the Ring in Hyde Park and catch a glimpse of the famous Lady as she drove by in her green chariot 'with the arms and supporters of Blessington blazoned on the centre panels, and the small coronet beneath the window' as it made the turn in the procession of equipages? Did he hear the whispered gossip of how the aged Countess of Jersey had tried to snub the brilliant newcomer?

The years slipped by. Coventry was allowed by his indulgent father to study whatever subjects took his fancy. At one time he thought of becoming a painter. He showed considerable talent for drawing, and in 1838 he was awarded the silver palette of the Royal Society of Arts for a copy of one of Landseer's pictures.

Although his father's preference for him rather set him apart from the rest of the family, Coventry was undoubtedly fond of his two brothers, George Morgan, born in 1825, and Gurney Eugene, born in 1826, and his only sister, Eliza Blanche born in 1827, and when in 1839 his father sent him to Paris, he felt very lost and lonely. He was sent to a school which was a branch of the Collège de France.

When I was sixteen [he writes] my father sent me to a school at

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St. Germains, in order to improve my French; but as he stipulated that I should have an apartment of my own, and should live with the Headmaster's family, learning from private tutors and not in classes, I did not mix with the other boys, nor learn to talk very fluently . . . I learned more German than French during the six months I spent at the school, and I became a pretty good fencer. . . .

Coventry was unused to academic discipline. He had always lived at home surrounded by people who loved and understood him. He felt lost in this strange country where life was so different. He missed his father, his brothers, and his adoring grandmother.

One charming letter from this lady survives from this period and shows what a delightful relation existed between them:

10th October 1839

My dearest dear Coventry,

I think of you every day, and *every* hour but particularly every Sunday: a beautiful day in France; the people all look so happy—and you are more so on that day—because you have your liberty, *think* if I could only be with you one Sunday and walk in the Forest, and see *Paris*. I thank you, my dearest, for the beautiful little views. I look at them and read your *letter* every day. I will take your advice and make myself as happy as I can without you, and you have a *Friend*; how delightful to meet with such a treasure at such a distance from home, you must tell him I am sure I should like him, because he is your *Friend*.

I am quite well but it is very cold here . . . so exposed to the North winds.

I am as ever your own Dear, Dear, Granny,

C. M. Patmore.

It was during this stay in France that Coventry Patmore experienced his first love affair, and this unfortunate business was to have a profound influence on the rest of his life.

He used to spend all his Sundays at the house of a great friend of his father's, Mrs. Charles Gore, who was the wife of a penniless Life Guardsman, and had been forced by her husband's poverty to turn to writing fiction for a living. A shrewd observer of social life and a woman of undoubted literary talent, Mrs. Gore's novels *Cecil*—or *the Adventures of a Coxcomb*

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and *Cecil, a Peer* enjoyed a wide success. She was an adept at the fashionable novel, and in the words of Mr. Michael Sadleir was 'one of the keenest-witted social novelists of the century'. She was a social figure of some importance, and in her salon the young Coventry met for the first time representatives of the hectic, witty, dissolute, and often *nouveau-riche* society that emerged after the Napoleonic Wars. 'She had a fine apartment,' he wrote later, 'in the Place Vendôme, and on Sundays, her rooms were full of the best literary and political society of Paris. I was too young to profit, as I might have done later, by these opportunities.' But he was not only too young: unlike his father, he was unsuited by temperament to such a *milieu*, being a romantic by nature.

Coventry Patmore, at this age, was tall and very thin, with a sensitive intellectual face and long auburn hair. He was attractive-looking, but unnaturally shy, and Mrs. Gore, who was a very worldly woman, could not, we may suppose, be bothered with this awkward young man.

It was during these Sunday visits—alluring oases in otherwise dreary weeks—that he fell in love with Mrs. Gore's young daughter, who was eighteen years old. However, he was so constrained that the young girl merely laughed at his infatuation and did not take the affair at all seriously.

His father evidently worried about his favourite son whilst he was away from home, and he wrote him a long letter full of sympathy and understanding:

London, Oct. 31, 1839.

My dear Coventry,

I am so very much pressed with the arrears which have accumulated during my month's holiday, that I have been obliged to delay replying to your letter, and must even now do so in much greater haste than I could wish. . . .

Then follow some fatherly instructions about the buying of a new pair of trousers—'dark and very warm'.

I am quite satisfied with the style and *composition* of your letter and you therefore have no occasion to be dissatisfied with them. The only exception to this is, that you do not punctuate—and consequently that you give the *appearance* (but nowhere the

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reality) of running your sentences into one another—simply for want of the *full stop* and the capital letter which in every case follows. With this exception there is nothing in your letters that should give you any fear about writing to Mrs. Gore, or anybody else whenever you have occasion to do so—though the only occasion you could or can have of writing to Mrs. Gore would be that of a few simple lines of civility to avoid the apparent incivility of sending my packets to her in a blank envelope for her to guess who they came from.

Taking the points of your letter *seriatim* (for I have turned to it—instead of writing in a hurry and at random—as I first hinted that I must)—I hope there is a little hyperbole in your expression of the pleasure you receive at the ‘Place’ [Place Vendôme]. If your visits there are ‘necessaries of life’ to you what will you do presently when they must cease?

Pray beware on this point—for I cannot afford to lose you whatever you may think of losing yourself. On this point, I will only remind you how *more than* dangerous how surely fatal it is, to set our inclinations too fixedly on objects which we are *certain* of being soon called upon to forego. It gives me great pleasure to find that your *first* introduction to that world in which you may soon have to move alone has been productive of such gratification to you—but let me beseech you to wear the pleasant and sweet-smelling garland *loosely* about your head, lest, when you are called upon to lay it aside, you may not, in plucking it off (like Iago’s wit), pluck forth brains and all.

Verbum sap!

You are quite right as to the next point in your letter. I do (as you anticipate) most earnestly desire you at once to abstain from staying at home so long at a time. It seems to me from what you say that you sit up much too late, and get up much too early—and do not take one-tenth part enough exercise. You *must* be in the *open air* at least two hours every day. You do not tell anything specific about fencing and dancing, each of which would go far to remedy the evil just alluded to. . . . Neither do you tell me anything about your friend Alexander. Who and what is he? And why do you like him? Do you still like him?—Your reason for disliking the other person alluded to in your letter is a most valid one—always provided it exists. . . .

Nothing gives me more pleasure than what you feel about Miller and his book,* and consequently what you feel about

**Rural Sketches*, by Thomas Miller, 1839.

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these simplicities of Nature of which his Book is so pleasing a transcript. While you preserve these two loves—the love of Nature and the love of Books—you may contrive (if needful) to dispense with all other loves and to set at defiance all that is the opposite of love. . . .

Frederick Page has a judicious comment on this last paragraph of Peter George's letter:

If for Nature we say Wordsworth, and for books Coleridge, we perceive the sixteen-year-old Patmore set upon his lifelong path that was Wordsworth through the forest that was Coleridge.

In this same letter [Mr. Page continues] we hear of the beginning of Patmore. The boy had consulted a Phrenologist, Deville, in Paris who had sagely advised him to think of himself as a poet, and this perhaps gives us the date, October, 1839, for Patmore's sudden burst into verse.

The young poet, inspired to write by his passion for Miss Gore, asked his father's advice about adopting the career of a poet and received the following sensible reply:

Touching poetry—if you have any of it in you it will be pretty sure to come out—whether you will or no—but do not *entice* it out—for of all follies there is none so foolish in its results as the habit of mere *verse*-writing. There is no harm in the Charivari man's phrenological prognostic about your head. But if there is anything in it (in the prognostic I mean) or if you think there is anything in it—it is a reason the more for eschewing verse-making: for I verily believe that never yet was a *poetical* genius that was not cursed rather than blessed by the possession—unless it was Shakespeare.

With deep insight the affectionate father ends his letter with the following remarks about Mrs. Gore's salon:

Bye-the-bye, you never tell me what you do in Paris when you go there—whether you stay there all day—whether you *dine* and *how* you dine, etc. Not that I am anxious about your proceedings at the 'Place'—but (shall I say it) I am rather anxious. And this not much from what you say, as from what you do *not* say. Whenever Telemachus was *silent* to his mentor,

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there was always some cause for fear to both. Do not suppose that I (your mentor—if you will let me be so) have any fear that the 'Place' should prove to you a Calypso's Island. But it may prove a more dangerous place—a Prospero's Island—without a Prospero to watch over the welfare of its inhabitants. You will tell me in reply that it is indeed a place

'full of sweet airs
That give delight and hurt not'

and that its Miranda is a Miranda—and what would I desire more? Yes—my dear little boy—you are not a Ferdinand. But (again you reply) can evil come out of good? Yes—the greatest of evils out of the greatest of goods—always understanding the axiom of now—middle of the 19th Century. Still, be assured, no evil can come to you even out of evil, much less out of good, while you lay bare all your thoughts and feelings to *me*, and listen to mine in return, as those of one who would fain be to you a Mentor and a Ulysses in one.

He concluded this long letter with :

I never preach to you, and never shall: though I am by no means sure that I may not some day or other—if you should happen to be cast away on an enchanted island like that of Calypso, and wish to take up your abode there—watch an opportunity of inveigling you to the top of a convenient cliff, and push you into the sea, jump in after you, at the imminent peril of both our precious lives: which is more than Mentor did for his Telemachus—for, being an immortal, he knew that there was no danger for either of them.

The apartment in the Place Vendôme did indeed prove to be a 'Calypso's Island'. The young boy of sixteen was enslaved by his young enchantress of eighteen. Miss Gore was young and heartless. She merely mocked at her youthful admirer and snubbed him mercilessly on every occasion. She did not realise that she had unwittingly loosed all the passions and creative impulses within this tall, shy and gawky boy.

He must have realised the hopelessness of his cause because, looking back on these unhappy days, he relates that he 'entertained for her a passion of a kind not uncommon in youths, a passion which neither hoped nor cared for much in return. I

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remember praying more than once, with torrents of tears, that the young lady might be happy, especially in marriage, with whomsoever it might be.'

Miss Gore soon forgot this episode. It was just another example of awkward calf love, and later she married Lord Edward Thynne.

Coventry Patmore never forgot. Basil Champneys asserts that 'it was, as it were, his matriculation in the school of love, and initiated him in the mysteries of emotion and feeling which were the foundation of his later poetry'.

Years after, when he was happily married to his first wife, he found a picture that resembled Miss Gore. He had it set in a frame with shutters and hung it in his drawing-room. When visitors inquired what was hidden, he would reply, 'the very first "Angel".'

CHAPTER SIX

First Poems

My childhood was a vision heavenly wrought;
Vast joys, of which I sometimes dream, yet fail
To recollect sufficient to bewail
And now for ever seek . . .

So wrote Coventry Patmore in his first sonnet. Gone for ever were the carefree days of his childhood. His six months' visit to France had shown him this all too clearly. On his return to London in 1840, he was still undecided what to do. He had an impulse to write poetry, and composed the first drafts of two poems, *The River* and *The Woodman's Daughter*. The delighted father had the two pieces set up in type, but his son's inspiration was not lasting and their publication was postponed.

The young poet then turned scientist. A disused kitchen in his father's London house was fitted up as a laboratory, and Coventry worked there incessantly at innumerable experiments. It is claimed that he showed considerable scientific ability, but this phase soon passed. However, his interest in science persisted throughout his whole life, and Frederick Page tells us that 'in later life he asserted that the chief use of Science was to supply similes to the poet, and his own poetry is illustrated from the physical sciences in an abundance with which among the English Poets only Francis Thompson in his verse, and Coleridge in his prose, ever compete'.

Meanwhile he was still studying poetry, and Shakespeare in particular, and among his earliest prose writings were two essays, one on *Macbeth* and the other on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The essay on *Macbeth* later appeared in the first issue of the Pre-Raphaelite paper *The Germ*, and was an attempt to prove 'that Macbeth had discussed with his wife the idea of usurping the monarchy before his interview with the witches'.

Like so many young men, Coventry was not sure what he

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required of life. Intensely emotional, sensuous, and passionate, he was also deeply religious. With English and German blood on his father's side and with Scottish on his mother's, he had inherited conflicting strains of character. Full of confused desires, he was torn between the almost pagan philosophy of his father and the stern Puritan ideals of his mother. This conflict of ideas is reflected in the first two poems he wrote—*The River* and *The Woodman's Daughter*—and in the later pieces which made up the *Poems of 1844*.

Frederick Page conjectures that these two long poems were written between the years 1839 and 1841. Patmore himself admitted that a reading of Coleridge's prose writings drew him away from his father's agnosticism, and Coleridge's influence is discernible in *The River*. Witness the opening stanza:

It is a venerable place,
An old ancestral ground,
So wide, the rainbow wholly stands
Within its lordly ground.

The other poem, *The Woodman's Daughter*, which later was to be so admired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and was to form the subjects for one of Millais' most famous pictures, shows a direct debt to Wordsworth—another of the young poet's enthusiasms. But both these earliest poems foreshadow Patmore's lifelong pre-occupation with the problems of psychology and of love.

Still he was undecided about his vocation as a poet. Already Mrs. Gore's worldly salon in the Place Vendôme had humiliated and frustrated his first attempts at love. In secret torment he turned to religion for consolation, and for a while it absorbed his mental problems. He wrote afterwards in his own autobiography:

As none of my family or friends ever went to Church, it was not till two or three years after this time that I began to think it might be a serious duty to do so, and when at last it dawned upon me, while I was about nineteen, that this would be right, it was with extreme shyness that I made what seemed to me so bold and extraordinary a profession of faith.

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It was during a three months' visit to Edinburgh to stay with his aunts, sisters of his mother, that this profession of faith took place. He tells us that these relations

were very pious members of the then new-born Free Kirk [the date is May, 1843] and were the first religious persons I had ever had anything to do with. I was at first delighted with this atmosphere, and the warmth with which I communicated my own aspirations much interested my new friends in me; but the inequality of my moods startled and somewhat shocked one of my Aunts, who told me that my strange alternations of ardent effort and despondent indifference reminded her of Saul. I was exceedingly ignorant (for all my reading) of what practical religion ought to be. I at first naturally went with whatever my Aunts and their friends practised and believed. Anxious to advance me in the good way, they introduced me to a widow and her daughter who had a great reputation for sanctity in their circle, and I went to this lady's house evening after evening expressly to be talked to and interested in sanctity.

How well one can imagine these dour Scotch ladies wrestling for the soul of the young poet, hoping and praying at each prayer-meeting that yet another sinner might be redeemed!

I was a good deal repelled [he continues] by my first lessons, but I thought that my repugnance was my own fault. I tried to follow the advice of these ladies in every particular. One point of their teaching was that an 'eminent Christian'—such as I aspired to be—ought to be able to make extemporaneous prayers aloud for the benefit of his company. I was the shyest of youths, but felt the thing a duty to be attempted, and some of my readers may perhaps be able to imagine the agony with which, at the request of my new friends, I dropped on my knees in their presence, and remained there utterly incapable of venting a word, and at last rose silent, confused, and ashamed.

His aunts had a genuine fear and horror of the Roman Catholic faith. But the young poet, repelled by the austerities of their religion, felt a moment's attraction for the older faith:

I remember [he wrote] repelling a moment's attractive thought that it might possibly be right, as a terrible temptation

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of the fiend, and prayed fervently that the abominable allure-
ment might never for an instant be entertained by me again.

Once back in London, among his books and studies, he found that the desire for a life devoted to religion had left him. Apparently he had thought of taking Orders about this period. Now the mood had gone, and he turned his mind to poetry again.

This religious mood was, however, to return later, and once again he was to feel the 'abominable allurements' of Rome. It is difficult in these times to realise the fear and hatred which the mass of English people felt for Roman Catholicism during the eighteen-forties and fifties. In his book *Father and Son*, Edmund Gosse relates how his father used regularly to give a penny to an itinerant onion-man 'because of his godly attitude towards the Papacy' in singing this doggerel:

Here's your rope . . .
To hang the Pope . . .
And a penn'orth of cheese to choke him.

The 'so-called Church of Rome' was an abomination to all right-thinking Protestants, Baptists, Freekirk-ites. It was literally 'the Scarlet Woman' of the fifties.

At this time all the literary world was talking about Tennyson's collected poems, which had been published in 1842. This book fired Coventry's poetic ambitions. He had already written two long narrative pieces and these were recast and re-polished. His father eagerly encouraged him to write more verse, and this time his muse did not betray him.

Led on by the affectionate guidance of his father and the enthusiastic encouragement of his father's literary allies, he finally chose the career of a poet.

These first poems of Coventry Patmore aroused intense anticipation among the critics. He was taken from one literary salon to another by his father, asked to read what he had written before the gathered guests and then eagerly applauded.

Even at the beginning of the poet's career, Laman Blanchard, an editor of the day, could write in 1842:

My strong and clear conviction of the extreme beauty and

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finish of what I heard last night remains this morning undiminished. They will bear thinking over, and the impression they make is a lasting one, I am sure.

Fired by all this praise, the young poet hurriedly wrote some more verses in order to supplement his slender output, and in 1844 *Poems by Coventry Patmore*, a slight green-bound volume, was published by Moxon. It was something of an honour to be launched by Moxon, for he had been the publisher of Keats, Lamb, Wordsworth and Landor. Robert Browning wrote to a friend in July, 1844:

A very interesting young poet has blushed into bloom this season. I send you his soul's child; the contents were handed and bandied about, and Moxon was told by the knowing ones of the literary turf that Patmore was safe. So Moxon relented from his stern purposes of publishing no more verse on his own account, and did publish this.

Leigh Hunt wrote an enthusiastic notice of the book, and Serjeant T. Noon Talfourd, the biographer of Charles Lamb, acclaimed the volume as 'a marvellous instance of genius anticipating time'.

To-day, these early poems are forgotten and unread. Coventry Patmore, always intensely critical of his own work, excluded most of them from his *Collected Poems*, and ever blamed his father for having urged him to publish so early. However, as Gosse writes:

The Poems of 1844 . . . as we look back upon it across sixty years, was a volume which might excuse in a father a somewhat rhapsodical outburst of language. . . . It spoke, not in borrowed tones, but in the voice of a new person. The effect of the pieces has become faint; their perfume has mainly evaporated. But it is easy to understand that they awakened hope and enthusiasm. . . .

At the age of twenty-one, young Patmore had become the centre of critical attention. But whilst his father's literary allies praised him, the great literary reviews such as *Blackwood's* were quick in attacking this new star in the poetical firmament. Because of his father's known friendship and defence of writer:

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like Leigh Hunt, Hazlitt, and Keats, Coventry Patmore was a certain target for the enmity of *Maga*, and the review published in the August of 1844 issue of *Blackwood's* is one of the most savage ever published in its pages. Unrepentant of its former persecution of Keats and Shelley, it reviewed Patmore's poems in the following strain :

This is the life into which the slime of the Keateses [*sic*] and Shelleys of former times has fecundated. The result was predicted a quarter of a century ago in this magazine—nothing is so tenacious as the spawn of frogs—the fry must become extinct in him. His poetry (thank Heaven !) cannot corrupt into anything worse than itself.

John Wilson (Christopher North) later apologised to Patmore for the *Blackwood's* onslaught, but it is not thought that Wilson wrote the piece himself. Other critics were quick to trace the new poet's literary influences. Champneys records that 'to one he seems to write on the exact pattern of Tennyson, to another he is the descendant of the "Lake" poets, especially Wordsworth, through Tennyson; another holds that he is obviously an imitator of Browning in his more intelligible moods'.

What were these poems that excited such controversy? The earliest, *The River*, is pure poetry and a long symbolical poem in which an undeclared and unbeloved lover drowns himself on his mistress's bridal night. Leigh Hunt, reviewing it anonymously in Ainsworth's Magazine (July, 1844), hears in the following quatrain a singular harmony between sound and sense; an effect which should always be unforced, as it is here:

The guard-hound, in the silent night,
Stops wrangling with his chain,
To hear, at every burst of barks,
The hills bark back again

He continues, 'The story is not of the rainbow, but of the thunder-cloud, and darker than night is its course, like the current of "The River" that gives it its name.'

Lilian, A Poem for 1844, is a long narrative poem about frustrated love. There is a Byronic melancholy about this tale of the lovely young girl, Lilian, who is corrupted by reading

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obscene French books and tires of the hero, Percy's, boyish adoration. One senses an echo of the unfortunate affair with Miss Gore in the Place Vendôme, especially in the passage where young Percy cries:

O Heaven! then can I nowhere
Plant my hope, there advance
These literary panders
Of that mighty brothel, France!

Three sonnets show real talent, and a long narrative poem called *Sir Hubert* is interesting as a forerunner of the Pre-Raphaelite manner, and because of the felicitous way in which Patmore conveys the delirium of happy love. Certain passages of *Sir Hubert*, later named *The Falcon* after the Boccaccio story on which it is based, forecast a technique which Patmore was to exploit in writing *The Angel in the House*. Already the poet was probing the mysteries of love, and the following verses from *Sir Hubert* bear favourable comparison with similar passages in his later works:

One morning, while he rested from his delving, spade in hand,
He thought of her and blest her, and he look'd about the land,
And he, and all he look'd at seemed to brighten and expand.

The wind was newly risen; and the airy skies were rife
With fleets of sailing cloudlets, and the trees were all in strife,
Extravagantly triumphant at their newly-gotten life.

Birds wrangled in the branches, with a trouble of sweet noise,
Even the conscious cuckoo, judging wisest to rejoice,
Shook round his 'cuckoo, cuckoo' as if careless of his voice.

But Hubert mused and marvell'd at the glory in his breast;
The first glow turn'd to passion, and he nurs'd it unexpressed;
And glory gilding glory turn'd at last, to sunny rest.

The stir created by the publication of his poems brought the young man several new and important friends. A note arrived from Gore House, in which Lady Blessington wrote to his father:

First Poems

I congratulate you on the charming poems of your Son. They are indeed beautiful, and fresh, and original as beautiful. My friend, Mr. Proctor had prepared me for something charming but these poems I confess, surpass my expectations. . . . I hope you will make me personally acquainted with the young Poet when you and he have leisure.

The young author was taken to see Miss Barrett, whom he greatly admired. He met Robert Browning and Monckton Milnes, then at the height of his fame as a social and literary figure. Finally, Bulwer Lytton wrote him a remarkable letter in which he said :

Your pages abound with unmistakable testimonials of no common genius—not one which does not proclaim the mind and heart of a Poet. I honestly, and without compliment, think the promise you hold out to us is perfectly startling, both from the luxuriance of fancy, and the subtle and reflective inclinations of your intellect. It rests with yourself alone to fulfil that promise—for no less honestly, I may say, tho' with respect, that I doubt if very large and material alterations in the faculty we call taste, are not essentially necessary to secure you the wide Audience and the permanent Fame which must root themselves in the universal sympathies, and the household affections of men. As yet you seem to me to lean more towards that class of Poets who are Poets to Poets—not Poets to the Multitude . . .

Patmore's reply is very revealing:

I beg to offer you my grateful thanks for which I feel to be incomparably the most satisfactory as well as the most valuable result that has yet occurred to me from the publication of my first efforts in verse.

Your letter indicates an interest in my little volume which will, I hope, excuse my troubling you (in justice to myself) with a few words touching its private history.

The poems called 'The River' and the 'Woodman's Daughter' were completely finished more than three years ago (before I was eighteen years old, or had given a single thought to the constructive branch of the art of Poetry, or indeed to anything but the mere execution of details). This will sufficiently explain to you the want of any predominating *idea* or *purpose* in the two first poems. I was, at that time, totally unacquainted with

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Tennyson, or with any other of the poets properly to be called of the present day, except Leigh Hunt. Next to the poets, contemporary with, or immediately succeeding, Shakespeare, my favourites were (and still are) Coleridge and Wordsworth.

There followed a period of nearly two years in which I wrote nothing at all in verses, but in that time I read Tennyson and studied some of Coleridge's prose metaphysical works. Then I began 'Lilian' and when it was about half completed I met with the misfortune of a publisher *volunteering* to produce at his own risk a volume of my poems as soon as I could get one ready. So 'Lilian' was concluded with unwarrantable haste, and 'Sir Hubert' became the offspring rather of the necessity (which Mr. Moxon urged) of filling fifty pages in half that number of days than of the judgment which, from the experience I had gained, ought by rights to have been brought to bear upon its production, and to have rendered it as much superior as I fear it is now inferior, on the whole, to its predecessors.

It is significant that Bulwer Lytton should diagnose so quickly the outstanding characteristic in Patmore's verse. He was fated to become a Poet's poet. Whilst his contemporaries—Tennyson amongst them—were on the road to popular fame and favour with the multitude, Coventry Patmore was destined to take a solitary path which would eventually lead him far from the applause of the crowd.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Disaster

See! his lithe, fragile form is bending over a book, that is spread open on his knees, his head drooping towards it like a plucked flower. The pale face is resting on the clasped hand, over which, and all around the small exquisitely modelled head, fall heavy waves of auburn hair, concealing all but one pale cheek—pale and cold marble, but smooth and soft as a girl's. Dead to all the brilliant nothings that are passing around him, the boy-poet has fallen upon some passage of his (just at present) sole idol in the temple of poetry, Milton.

PETER GEORGE PATMORE has left us this somewhat romanticised portrait of Coventry as he was at this period. Perhaps Gosse's presentation of the young poet's appearance is nearer the truth:

Very tall and thin, his small bright head poised lightly on his shoulders, a look of admirable candour in the broad forehead, prominent mobile lips, and sparkling eyes. These latter, doubtless, as we see them in Brett's admirable drawing of a few years later, were what gave positive charm to the features—these dark, liquid, vivid eyes, and the silky rolling hair.

Such was the outward appearance of the young poet when, at the age of twenty-one, he found the doors of literary London thrown open to welcome him. He possessed none of the easy social graces of his father. He was still awkward in company, and had inherited the reserved and outwardly cold manner of his mother, as well as her religious fervour. But he must have possessed a shy charm, and his conversation, when he did speak, was unusually brilliant.

His father had dedicated him to the Muses. We can only surmise that the austere Scotch mother had secretly dedicated him to the service of God. Although they were joined together

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by common interests and great affection, father and son were totally unlike each other. Gay, irresponsible, cultured, a happy atheist, the father stands out in complete contrast to his more brilliant son.

But times were changing. The frivolous young Queen of England had married. The influence of Albert the Good was about to dominate English life. Coventry Patmore with his passionate sincerity, his enthusiastic partisanship of the sanctity of matrimony, suited the coming mood of the period.

But whilst he was accepting the advice of Miss Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, and the admiring praises of the ladies in Mrs. Basil Montagu's and Mrs. Procter's drawing-rooms, suddenly his pleasant world was shattered by a completely unexpected event.

One morning he awoke to find himself penniless. Peter George Patmore, always inclined to be extravagant, had apparently so mismanaged his money affairs that by 1844 the family fortune had considerably diminished. In a frantic attempt to recover his losses, he had gambled wildly in railway shares and lost. In this he was following the example of many others. Matters were desperate, and he was so deeply involved that in 1845 he was forced to leave the country secretly and fly to France. His wife accompanied him on this flight, but Coventry and his younger brother were left to look after themselves. The only news the two brothers received of this sudden change in fortune was a letter from their father enclosing a remittance, with the intimation that they must now earn their own livings. This is the last we hear of P. G. Patmore for many years.

Up to this time Coventry had never worried about money. It had always been conveniently at hand. However, the two young men rose to the occasion bravely. They wrote for magazines, and attempted several translations from French and German. Coventry Patmore relates that he managed to scrape together twenty-five shillings a week, often working as much as sixteen hours a day.

Undoubtedly, their father's friends and acquaintances helped the boys with introductions and encouragement. And even Thackeray, hearing of the young poet's plight, although he does not appear to have known him, generously took the

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trouble to write to Nickisson, the publisher of *Fraser's*, the following letter :

October 3rd, 1846.

Dear Nickisson,

I beg you 10,000 pardons for not answering your note. I quite forgot it, that's the truth, until it reproached me yesterday. Will you pay special attention to the accompanying paper by young Patmore the poet—he is himself a most deserving and clever young fellow who will be a genius some day; and his paper is so odd, humorous and amusing that I hope you will secure it and its author, as a future contributor.

Yours ever,

W. M. T.

I hope the sea-air will do you and Mrs. Nickisson and Master Nickisson all the good which such good people deserve. If you will use this for next month, I promise you an article (D.V.). The fact is that young Mr. Patmore wants help at this present juncture.

It is not known what this 'odd, humorous and amusing' contribution was, but that indefatigable commentator on Patmore, Mr. Frederick Page, conjectures that 'it may have been on "Popular Serial Literature" which dealt with Dickens, Thackeray and others'. Another of Coventry Patmore's journalistic contributions written in this precarious period was a poem called *Vive la Guerre* which appeared in *Punch*, again thanks to Thackeray's help.

This struggle for existence went on for fifteen months. One day, the young man's finances were reduced to three shillings and sixpence. In a defiant gesture he recklessly spent this last money on ices, and on returning home found a payment awaiting him for some article he had written. And so the months went by until one night, at a dinner party given by Mrs. Procter, Richard Monckton Milnes, afterwards Lord Houghton, came to the rescue. Gosse writes that

after dinner at her house in 1846, Monckton Milnes said to her in the drawing-room—'And who is your lean young friend with the frayed coat-cuffs?' 'Oh, Mr. Milnes,' she replied, 'you wouldn't talk that way if you knew how clever he is and how

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unfortunate. Have you read his poems?' Milnes took them away in his pocket, and wrote to her the next morning—'If your young friend would like a post in the Library of the British Museum, it shall be obtained for him, if only to induce you to forget what must have seemed my heartless flippancy. His book is the work of a true poet, and we must see that he lacks not butter for his bread.'

A little while later, Coventry Patmore received a note from Milnes enclosing a letter of introduction to Mr. Panizzi, the Librarian of the British Museum. This letter shows how deep an impression Patmore's work had made on Milnes:

April 11th, '46.

Dear Panizzi,

I am extremely interested in the destiny of the Bearer of this letter to you, *Mr. Coventry Patmore*. I don't know whether you have seen any of his writings, but I maintain they are of the highest genius and with the due amount of absurdity which youth demands and excuses. He is, I believe, totally dependent on his pen for his subsistence and I am very anxious to get him regular employment in your world of books.

The Archbishop (of Canterbury) has written very kindly to me about him and suggests that he should see Mr. Marshall and other persons about the Museum, who would see what he was fit for and what might be done with him. Hallam also is interested about him and Inglisch writes that he would do what he could, but has just got employment for a young protégé of his own. I think you will be struck with the ingenuousness, modesty, and intelligence of this youth, who may really come to a Chatterton's fate, unless something be done to help him.

I remain, yours always,

R. M. Milnes.

Eagerly he followed up Milnes's introduction. He saw Mr. Panizzi and afterwards wrote to his protector:

12, Arundel Street, Strand.

April 14, 1846.

My dear Sir,

Mr. Panizzi received me very kindly this morning. He told me that a vacancy was likely to occur at the Museum in the course of two or three months, and that he thought he should



COVENTRY PATMORE.
From a drawing by John Brett, R.A., 1855

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be able to secure the appointment for me. The employment would be, in the first instance, assisting in the formation of the catalogues, and the remuneration about two guineas and a half a week, which would be increased in time. The appointment would be temporary at first, but Mr. Panizzi made no question of its becoming permanent.

I need scarcely assure you, my dear sir, of the pleasure with which I shall accept such an appointment should I be happy enough to have it offered me,

Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Very sincerely yours,

Coventry K. Patmore.

It is said that the Museum authorities hesitated in making the appointment, despite Milnes's active intervention, as Patmore knew so few languages. Many months went by till, on November 18th, 1846, the anxious applicant received the following note from the Secretary:

Mr. Forshall has the pleasure to acquaint Mr. Coventry Patmore that the Principal Trustees have nominated him to be one of the supernumerary Assistants in the Department of the Printed Books in the British Museum.

If Mr. Patmore will call on Mr. Panizzi he will learn at what time he may commence his engagement, and every necessary particular respecting his duty.

British Museum.

The unexpected kindness and help of Monckton Milnes also started a friendship between the two men that lasted all through his life. Coventry Patmore was eternally grateful to the statesman and poet who at this period was a short, dark, plump but kindly man, eager to help any young talent.

In later years, looking back on these early struggles, Patmore wrote that 'Lord Houghton was as thoughtful as he was kind and generous in disposition': and he described Panizzi as 'the most able administrator I have known. He was very rough and Bismarckian in his manners, but he was never offensive to any of his subordinates so long as they did their duty'.

Soon he was able in a small way to repay the debt he owed to his benefactor.

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Milnes had been working for a considerable time on his famous *Life and Letters of Keats*. Patmore was able to help in the preparation of this important book. He was very familiar with Keats' work, as his own father had been an early and ardent admirer of the poet. The Houghton Papers, in the possession of Milnes's son, the Marquess of Crewe, show that Patmore transcribed eleven of Keats' poems, (mostly sonnets), seven letters and five articles.

These unpublished letters of Keats had a profound effect on the sensitive young poet, and, writing to Monckton Milnes during his collaboration over the *Life*, he says:

The interest of these last letters, with Severn's, is nothing short of *frightful* to me. I leave off copying them with much the same impression as I awoke with last night, after a very dreadful nightmare. Seldom has there appeared a contribution to some future 'Philosophy of Human Nature' of such importance as our *Life of Keats* will be. With many thanks for the favour of having been among the first to see these terrible letters—for, from the beginning, there was a whisper of the end.

A few years later, in 1853, Patmore was to dedicate his second volume of poems, *Tamerton Church Tower*, to 'Richard Monckton Milnes as an expression of the author's respect and warm regard'. And when his eldest son was born he was christened Milnes, after his father's benefactor. The letter from Patmore to Monckton Milnes asking him to act as Godfather to the child, shows yet again how deep was Patmore's gratitude:

I wish very much that my little boy should be called by a name which shall remind him of his father's debts to one, but for whose kindness there would have been no little boy to be named. Will you impose upon me the additional obligation to gratitude by conferring upon my son, in your name, a continual lesson of thankfulness?

Milnes helped his young friend in many ways. One letter from Coventry Patmore thanks him for a card for a soirée at Lord Northampton's, and yet another letter mentions the loan of fifteen pounds. In a hitherto unpublished letter to Milnes, he explains his financial difficulties:

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Library, British Museum.

Wednesday, May 20, 1847.

Dear Mr. Milnes,

A circumstance which is causing me considerable uneasiness induces me to beg the favour that you will lend me £15 for four months. My father has allowed himself to come under a pecuniary obligation of a nature such that I shall feel a reflection of his discredit upon myself if it is not discharged by Friday next. With £15, and what I have saved, I shall be able to do what I wish.

I blush to have so far told you the cause of my request; but I should have been more ashamed of asking you to add to a weight of gratitude which already oppresses me, without showing a very urgent reason for doing so.

Believe me, my dear Mr. Milnes,

Affectionately yours,

Coventry K. Patmore.

The loan was later repaid. He was always punctilious in money matters. But there is no doubt that Milnes' practical help and interest enabled him to marry. For on May 17th, 1848, he became engaged to Miss Emily Augusta Andrews—a young lady who was destined to immortality as *The Angel in the House*.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Married Lover

He meets by heavenly chance express
The destined maid; some hidden hand
Unveils to him that loveliness
Which others cannot understand. . . .

—*The Angel in the House*, Book I, Canto III.

HE was twenty-four when he first saw Miss Andrews. They met at the house of Laman Blanchard. She was twenty-three, the orphan daughter of the Reverend Edward Andrews, who had been a Congregationalist minister and had taught Ruskin Greek.

In *Praeterita*, Ruskin wrote:

The Doctor, it afterwards turned out, knew little more of Greek than the letters and the declension of nouns; but he wrote the letters prettily, and had an accurate and sensitive ear for rhythm.

She was a beautiful girl, with finely chiselled features, large brown eyes—‘clear lakes of love’—and hectically flushed cheeks that, with their delicate transparency, foretold the threat of consumption. They immediately fell madly in love. Emily Andrews was the embodiment of all the young poet’s dreams. She was as learned as she was beautiful. She read Latin, Greek and French, and she knew and admired his poems!

It was May. And now, as if by some miracle, he was in love. For years he had been obsessed with this absorbing theme. Even in one of his earliest sonnets he had written:

At nine years old I was Love’s willing Page:
Poets love earlier than other men. . . .

A chance meeting in Blanchard’s drawing-room, some con-

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versation during which the two young people rapturously discovered their mutual attraction. And then the sudden realisation of the unbelievable fact that their intellectual tastes harmonised—they both liked and believed in the same things! The young girl even appreciated and admired Emerson, who had just become Patmore's literary enthusiasm. They were swept up into a delirious world of their own.

All his latent passion and mysticism were aroused, and, fired with ecstasy, he beheld a world translated.

She was alone in the world. He was young and poor. But what did that matter? It was Spring. In his own words, 'the hedges were hung with bridal wreaths, and breadths of primrose lit the air, the leaves, all stirring, mimicked well a neighbouring rush of rivers cold, and, as the sun or shadow fell, so these were green and those were gold.' It was the time for love.

On May 17th, 1847, during the course of a walk across the fields at Hampstead, he proposed marriage to his beloved, and was accepted. In those days Hampstead was a country village, unspoilt by town developments, and surrounded by fragrant lanes with hedges covered with hawthorn in bloom. They must have made a handsome couple as they wandered slowly along these lanes, she clinging to his arm, her face upturned to his—for he was very tall.

He was always to recall the rapture of these moments, and years later he remembered this walk in one of his most beautiful poems—*Amelia*. He was to remember her for ever as she stood beside those Hampstead fields,

Like a young apple-tree, in flushed array
Of white and ruddy flower, auroral, gay.

He remembered how

We went alone
By walls o'er which the lilac's numerous plume
Shook down perfume . . .
And, 'gainst the clear sky cold,
Which shone afar
Crowded with sunny alps oracular,
Great chestnuts raised themselves abroad
Like cliffs of bloom.

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The betrothal announced, Patmore, in his new-found happiness, felt a fresh and greater awakening of his poetical gifts. He would celebrate his great love by writing a poem 'that should exemplify and condense the whole system of amatory experience'.

He wrote to Emily Andrews :

I have been meditating a poem for you, but I am determined not to give you anything I write unless it is the best thing I have written. Oh, how much the best it ought to be, if it would do justice to its subject.

Another day he sent his betrothed a copy of Emerson's *Essays*, and asked her to mark the passages of which she specially approved or disapproved. Such was the harmony between the two lovers that, to his delight, he found she had marked all the passages he himself admired.

In September of 1847, a few months after he had proposed, they were married at St. John's Church, Hampstead. The honeymoon was spent at Hastings, and so began a marriage that will always be remembered because of its exquisite harmony.

Coventry Patmore's philosophy of marriage was original. As Gosse comments :

Between Coventry Patmore, however, and almost all other poets of high distinction in the history of literature, there was to be this remarkable distinction, that while the rest celebrated the liberty, the freshness and the delirium of love, whether in the physical or metaphysical sense, but always rather in the mood of anticipation than of possession, or, if in that of possession, at least in a spirit which feigns to ignore the bonds of custom, Patmore alone is eagerly pleased to hug and gild these bonds. He confesses himself not the poet of passion in the abstract, but of a love made a willing captive by the marriage tie.

It appears that the young man had meditated for a long time about his particular conception of marriage. To him, marriage between a man and woman was the earthly symbol of the marriage between God and the Soul. Again Gosse notes :

From his earliest Protestant days he had unconsciously re-

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garded marriage as a 'sacrament' and when he married he did not do so blindly but deliberately and eagerly, as one who could not regard love as possible, or at least as matter fit for imaginative contemplation, until it was legalized by Church and State.

In Emily Patmore the poet found all that he had secretly searched for, and their happiness was to inspire him to write one of the few great poems in praise of Married Love.

It was the peculiarity of Patmore's mind [Gosse points out] that the exclusively æsthetic idea of marriage inflamed his imagination with a noble excitement. He saw no difference between marriage and poetry.

The honeymoon over, the young couple returned to London, and went to live in a small house at The Grove, Highgate Rise, which has since been burnt down. They lived very simply. But Emily Patmore was an excellent housekeeper and she made the best of their slender income; for all they possessed was his salary as an Assistant Librarian at the British Museum.

It is believed that practically none of Coventry Patmore's letters to her, or hers to him survive, but we have been left three remarkable portraits of her, executed at this period, which all pay tribute to her excellent qualities and unusual beauty. She was painted by Millais, sculptured by Thomas Woolner, and portrayed in verse by Robert Browning.

By reason of Emily Patmore's charm and beauty, and the brilliant originality of Coventry Patmore's mind, their little drawing-room became the meeting place of such different personalities as Tennyson, Carlyle, Ruskin and Browning. Coventry Patmore has left an entertaining description of one of these small gatherings :

When we lived at 'The Grove' . . . , we once had a small party, consisting of Ruskin, Tennyson, and Browning only. Sydney Dobell came in late in the evening, and sat down by my wife, and began talking cleverly and very predominantly, laying down the law about many things. Hearing my wife address Mr. Ruskin by name, he asked in a whisper 'Is that *the* Mr. Ruskin?' and became a little less authoritative. After making similar inquiries when he heard the other names he became quite shy.

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We have also been left a glimpse of this interesting circle, presided over by the charming young Mrs. Patmore. She would sit by the fire, the folds of her crinoline billowing around her like a soft cloud, and quietly listen to the talk. She proved an excellent and appreciative listener to the men—able to take her own modest part in their Olympian conversation with apt and witty remarks, whilst all the time ‘her deft fingers were always occupied with embroidery or work of more practical utility’.

Thus she sat enthroned, in her neat little Victorian sitting-room, adored by her young husband, and admired by her distinguished visitors. We are told that ‘those who met her for the first time were amazed by her strange beauty and extreme innocence of manner’. Tennyson, an important new friend of the young couple, was immediately captivated by her ‘splendid’ appearance combined with ‘so milk-maid-like an absence of pretension’. Ruskin and Carlyle were among her outspoken admirers, and she was soon to become an inspiration to the eager young Pre-Raphaelites.

Gosse writes :

Dignity of manner, more purity and force, than actual sweetness, great nonchalance in anxious embarrassing moments, a sense of the pomp of matronly ceremonial, which bordered on the excessive, combined with some lack of humour—these seem to be certain of the social characteristics of Emily Patmore when we strip them of the panegyrics of her dazzled admirers.

Robert Browning has left us the following charming portrait of her in verse under the title of *A Face*—

If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pale gold
Such as the Tuscan’s early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, that should be opening soft
In the pure profile—not as when she laughs,
For that spoils all—but rather as aloft
Some hyacinth she loves so leaned its staff’s
Burthen of honey-coloured studs to kiss
Or capture, twixt the lips, apart for this.



EMILY AUGUSTA PATMORE.
From a drawing by John Brett, R.A.

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Then her lithe neck, three fingers might surround,
How it should waver on the pale gold ground
Up to the fruit-shaped perfect chin it lifts!

Coventry Patmore was always very particular about his surroundings and liked his house to be well furnished and comfortably arranged:

In his early married days he always chose for his own room or study an attic of the house in which he might be living, had it whitewashed and supplied with two or three wooden armchairs, a common sofa, a very scant supply of books, and a writing-table [so Champneys writes]

To this room he only took his most particular friends for talks. He did not indulge in tobacco in his youth: he invariably found that sitting in a room with others smoking gave him a headache, so that to be asked by him to smoke while talking was the greatest sign of friendship. . . .

Here, at other times, he would retire to read quietly by himself—although he had always been a great reader, he was never fond of having many books in his own study; the few he had most frequently in use were generally kept out of his sight. He usually placed his book on a table while reading, only touching it with his hands when turning over a leaf. This fastidiousness has caused him to say more than once—‘I could not make . . . a friend. Did you see how careless he was with that book?’

Emily Patmore undoubtedly enjoyed housekeeping. She wrote a book on how to train and keep servants called *The Servant's Behaviour Book*, and we are told that on one occasion ‘she found that one of her maids was “keeping company” without immediate or definite prospect of marriage. Considering the position unsatisfactory and being a strong advocate of matrimony, she persuaded the lovers to marry forthwith, taking on herself all the trouble and expense of the wedding, and giving the breakfast at her own house’.

Meantime, at the British Museum Library, Patmore carried on his work as librarian. He kept somewhat aloof from his colleagues, and Dr. Richard Garnett recalls how,

When I came, a mere lad, to work in the Library of the British Museum, I was introduced to all my colleagues with

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one, doubtless accidental, exception. I was some time before finding out who the tall, spare, silent man was who, alone of the assistants, sat in the King's Library, who, though perfectly urbane when he did converse, seemed rather among than of the rest of the staff, and who appeared to be usually entrusted with some exceptional task, now cataloguing a mighty collection of sermons from the King's Library gallery, now the pamphlets of the French Revolution.

However, Coventry Patmore also found time to write, and if a poem was on hand, his cataloguing work had to give way. Sometimes the inspiration would come quickly. Garnett writes :

His composition was rapid I have frequently seen twenty or more lines which he had written, he said, in the last half-hour, and refashioning was rarely needful.

He was not always so serious. He made friends of young men of his own age, among them being two young men interested in writing—Alfred Fryer and Henry Sutton. They were youthful admirers of his first poems, and Fryer and his wife wrote to his friend Sutton, who lived in Nottingham :

We went to the Museum the day after I came and had a long talk with Patmore. He is not at all like the cove we took him for. He is very tall and slender. He came here on Sunday and talked splendidly to us for four hours We think more highly of him from his conversation than even from his poems. . . . We think him very unassuming and a capital fellow: he can laugh as heartily as you please! . . . He thinks of writing a poem to be *the* poem of the age, but half doubts his own powers.

In his turn Patmore wrote to Sutton, and, after discussing books and his own poems, said :

But do not let all our talk be of miserable books!! Let me tell you that I love you more every letter I receive from you—and a minute of the sense of love is better than a play of Shakespeare's. And I love Alfred Fryer so too. He is a noble fellow, and will be much nobler.

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And another time he wrote to his own wife:

I have not the least dread of making you vain. Women who are merely 'pretty' or 'handsome' always are more or less vain, but real beauty like yours is never vain; it is like genius, which is always humble, while 'talent' or 'cleverness' are always proud.

His heart was continuously grateful for the miraculous happiness of his marriage. As he sat working in the Museum he would often think of her, waiting for him in their small house, and of how 'round her happy footsteps blow the authentic airs of Paradise'.

At the same time his ardent but hitherto innocent nature was troubled by the joys of marriage. Writing in a private memorandum of prayers in May, 1861, he asks: 'That in my conduct to my wife I may become more and more chaste, affectionate, tender, just, courtly and actively pleasing and benevolent'; and, underlined, 'that my conscience may become healthier and more proportionate.'

Earlier he had written to his friend Sutton, 'I desire greatly to mortify the lusts of the flesh after your way.'

But Emily understood her husband, and in another later private memorandum he recorded 'her wifely love, which acutely felt every variation of my irregular moods, yet never showed any impatience.'

On the first commemoration of their wedding day he wrote to his wife:

The desire of mind to mind is never satiated but rather increased by inter-communion: when this desire of soul for soul is true, all other desire follows, and as far as possible keeps pace; and receives glory from its happy symbolization of the spiritual yearning: therefore we have found and shall find that each commemoration of our wedding-day is more than a renewal of that day; that the bride and bridegroom have not been lost in the husband and wife, but that the never-failing freshness and mystery of marriage is increased each year by the sum of all the love and joy which have arisen between us during its happy months.

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Soon these all too brief years of happiness were to be snatched from him, but at the moment he felt secure in her love and ready to dedicate all his genius to sing her praises. To him, she represented Love—she was his earthly ‘Angel in the House—by whom and for whom I became a Poet’.

CHAPTER NINE

The Pre-Raphaelites

TO-DAY, the world is apt to forget the part that Coventry Patmore played in helping the Pre-Raphaelite Brethren in their fight for recognition. Even William Gaunt in his recent *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy** makes little mention of it. Yet Patmore had always been interested in the Arts. He had studied painting as a young boy, and all through his life took an intelligent interest in the paintings of his contemporaries. I remember visiting Lymington as a boy and seeing his picture collection before it was sold by his widow. It was the collection of a man of taste, remarkable in a period when taste was affected by Victorian ideals, and it contained two fine Constables, well-chosen examples of the Pre-Raphaelites, and many beautiful eighteenth-century miniatures. So it is not surprising that it was Patmore who persuaded Ruskin to write his famous letter to *The Times* in 1851 defending the whole Pre-Raphaelite Movement.

Modern art critics now see the whole Pre-Raphaelite Movement in its true perspective. We are not shocked by these sad-eyed ladies with their flowing Titian-red hair, these brooding saints upholding white lilies of chastity, and these gaily-coloured groups of figures, inspired by Boccaccio and Dante, that now look down at us a little mournfully from the walls of the Tate Gallery and the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Rather, we are impressed by the ideals that possessed these young Victorian painters and we can appreciate what Mr. Gaunt has so aptly called 'the Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy'. But, like all new movements, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was attacked and ridiculed when it was first formed, and Coventry Patmore was one of its first champions.

Turning over the pages of William Michael Rossetti's *Pre-*

**The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy* by William Gaunt. (Cape.)

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Raphaelite Diaries and Letters, we find frequent references to the young Patmore couple. In those early days, the poet was the first established writer to lend them encouragement and help. In return, he received adulation and praise from the youthful members of the group which were almost undergraduate in enthusiasm.

Curiously enough, Patmore's *Poems* of 1844, in their style and thought, embodied many of the principles which were later announced in a manifesto of the Brethren. Recalling the days of 1844, William Michael Rossetti wrote:

Mr. Patmore's first volume of poetry, having come out in 1844, was soon afterwards reviewed with commendation in a publication that Leigh Hunt was bringing out. My brother (Dante Gabriel) and I read that review and were impressed by it, and soon we got the book. . . .

We admired the poems enormously, and I daresay that in the course of a couple of years we had read every one of them through twenty or thirty times. Gabriel was certain to talk about them to fellow students at the R.A. and more especially to Hunt, Millais and Woolner.

Holman Hunt also recorded in his *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* that Patmore was listed as one of the immortals in the manifesto of Immortals which the Brotherhood drew up with the introductory words:

We, the undersigned, declare that the following list of Immortals constitutes the whole of our creed, and that there exists no other Immortality than what is centred in their names and in the names of their contemporaries, in whom this list is reflected.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or the P.R.B. as they liked to call themselves, had come into being in 1848. Disgusted with mid-Victorian painting, their aims were 'to throw over the stale conventions by which art was becoming strangled, to return to a direct study of Nature, considering no representation of even its least important accessories unworthy of attention and labour, and to enlarge their range of subject by the inclusion of everything which could make any legitimate appeal to the aesthetic sense'.

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A year later after the formation of the group, Thomas Woolner, who was the sculptor of the Brotherhood, sought Patmore's acquaintance. Holman Hunt, describing what impelled him to do this, wrote:

When Patmore's *The Woodman's Daughter* had been recited by Rossetti, Woolner expressed regret that it could no longer be obtained at the publishers, whereupon the reciter advised him to write to the author direct, and this led to the making of a valuable new friend for us all, and of an introduction to the most important and interesting literary circle existing.

Woolner's meeting with Patmore was a great success. The young sculptor was also interested in writing verse, and showed the slightly older poet some of his own compositions. Patmore was touched and flattered by his youthful admiration, apart from liking the man. Woolner was twenty-four, 'ardent and impetuous' and, in Holman Hunt's words, 'about five feet eight in height, and of robust build; he had thick blonde hair inclining to brown, and with his dark eyes he was a well-looking youth'. Soon we read in the Pre-Raphaelite diaries, on October 18th, 1849:

Woolner has begun a medallion portrait of Patmore, who has given him three sittings, beginning on Sunday. Woolner was invited to dine at Patmore's house, where he, too, fell a captive to the spell of Mrs. Patmore and executed a medallion of her as well.

Naturally, he talked enthusiastically of his fellow Brethren, and Patmore was persuaded to meet the others.

On Wednesday, 7th November, 1849, the Diaries note:

This was the evening fixed for Millais' and Gabriel's introduction to Patmore at Woolner's study. Gabriel and I went, and Patmore came but Millais appeared not.

The wording of this entry shows how eager and enthusiastic the young Pre-Raphaelites were at this period. To them Patmore was a personality of some importance, and, like children, they were anxious to make a good impression.

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Coventry Patmore, the young intimate of Tennyson and the friend of Ruskin, Browning and Carlyle, rather lorded it over them. He advised Millais to keep a diary, and the youthful painter started one forthwith. He advised Woolner on 'the necessity of never leaving a poem till the whole of it be brought to a pitch of excellence perfectly satisfactory'. Dante Gabriel Rossetti submitted his translation of *Early Italian Poets* to him before publication.

The Brethren asked him to contribute to the first issue of their paper *The Germ—Thoughts towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art*, and he graciously sent them a poem called *The Seasons*, but with the proviso that his name should not appear, as he meant to keep it back in all instances till the publication of his new volume. Patmore also invented a motto of perfection for the journalistic venture, which was—'It is the last rub that polishes the mirror'.

This poem, *The Seasons*, was enthusiastically received, and Rossetti, copying it out at length:

The Seasons

The crocus, in the shrewd March morn,
Thrusts up his saffron spear;
And April dots the sombre thorn
With gems, and loveliest cheer.

Then sleep the seasons, full of might;
While slowly swells the pod,
And rounds the peach, and in the night
The mushroom bursts the sod.

The winter comes: the frozen rut,
Is bound with silver bars:
The white drift heaps against the hut
And night is pierced with stars.

included it in a letter to his brother and wrote—'Stunning, isn't it?'

It is an interesting fact that Gerard Manley Hopkins set this same poem to music many years later under the title *The Crocus*.

During the last months of 1849, Patmore seems to have seen the Brethren almost continuously:

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We all saw a good deal of Mr. Patmore, and we all looked up to him for his performances in poetry, his general intellectual insight and maturity, and his knowledge of important persons whom we came to know through him—Tennyson in especial.

One evening they would meet at one of their studios, and on another at Patmore's house. Long arguments would ensue on the respective merits of various poets and writers, and they would all respectfully listen to Mr. Patmore's opinions.

Patmore, talking of Philip James Bailey,* remarked that 'he seems to be "painting on clouds" not having his foot on reality'. Another night 'Patmore professing that Burns is a greater poet than Tennyson, in which Tennyson himself fully concurs'.

It was a charming circle of young artists and writers who were enthusiastic over each other's work. 'Patmore thinks Millais' picture far better than anything Keats ever did,' and not to be outdone, Millais declared to his friends 'that if he had seen Patmore's hand alone cut off, he could have sworn to it as that of a man of genius'.

In 1861, Millais painted the portrait of Emily Patmore that now hangs in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. In Gosse's words :

The painting is a rondo, extremely vivid in colour and finished like one of Holbein's small brilliant portraits at Basle. It represents the subject in complete full face, gazing out of the canvas with great brown eyes under the heavy curtains of her voluminous dark hair, which is drawn up in the curious Early Victorian way, so as to hide the ears. The complexion is transparently hectic, with that dangerous hue on the lips and cheeks which has more of life than life itself should have. The whole candid face and high-poised head breathes an indomitable earnestness and purity. One feels that this finely-coloured creature will be living all for duty and the ideal.

Millais also painted a picture illustrating Patmore's poem *The Woodman's Daughter*, and this is one of the works he showed in the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1851. It was one of three paintings, the others being *Mariana* and *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*, which roused the Press to a fury of criticism.

*Philip James Bailey, author of *Festus* a celebrated poem of the day, now forgotten.

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Even *The Times* wrote about the Brethren's pictures:

The Council of the Academy, acting in a spirit of toleration and indulgence to young artists, have now allowed these extravagances to disgrace their walls for the last three years, and though we cannot prevent men who are capable of better things from wasting their talents on ugliness and conceit, the public may fairly require that such offensive jests should not continue to be exposed as specimens of the waywardness of these artists who have relapsed into the infancy of their profession.

Furthermore, it disapproved of 'drapery that was snapped instead of folded' and of 'faces bloated into apoplexy or attenuated to skeletons, colour borrowed from the jars in a druggist's shop, and expression forced into caricature'.

The group of youthful enthusiasts, which included Millais, Rossetti and Holman Hunt, as well as Woolner and John Brett, raged at this onslaught, and Patmore relates that 'the day when *The Times* made its furious attack on Millais' picture of *Christ in the Carpenter's Shop*, he came to me in great agitation and anger, and begged me to ask Ruskin to take up the matter. I went at once to Ruskin, and the day after there appeared in *The Times* a letter of great length and amazing quality, considering how short a time Ruskin had to examine the picture and make up his mind about it'.

Ruskin's letter turned the scales of public opinion. As David Larg comments on the letter in his book *Trial by Virgins*:

It could not have been better composed if it had been the award of an arbitration panel. It put everybody right; 'The Times' critic as well as the P.R.B. whose 'Romanist' and Tractarian tendencies were detected and condemned. But, on the whole, the P.R.B. came out with flying colours. 'And so I wish them all,' said Ruskin, 'heartily, good speed, believing in sincerity, that if they temper the courage and energy which they have shown in the adoption of their system with patience and discretion in framing it, and if they do not suffer themselves to be driven by harsh or careless criticism into rejection of the ordinary means of obtaining influence over the minds of others, they may, as they gain experience, lay in our England the foundations of a school of Art nobler than the world has seen for three hundred years'.

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Success eventually destroyed many of these friendships. The Brethren were all so intensely individual that their temperaments were bound to clash. However, Patmore kept the friendship of Woolner and F. G. Stephens all his life, and, in 1875, he attempted to renew his friendship with Rossetti.

All through his early married life Coventry Patmore kept in touch with the Brethren. In 1857, it was he who undertook to visit Oxford and see the famous frescoes executed by Rossetti, William Morris and others in the rooms of the 'Union'. His article, published in *The Saturday Review* for the 26th December, 1857, in which he speaks of the colour of the frescoes as 'sweet, bright and pure as that of the frailest waif of cloud in sunrise' is the only record of their first fugitive and fairy-like beauty.

This article was unsigned, and as it has never been reproduced, it is worth quoting. Under the title *Walls and Wall Paintings in Oxford*, he wrote:

These paintings, which are in distemper, not fresco, promise to turn out novelties—and quite successful novelties, in Art. We have not seen any mural painting which at all resembles, or, in certain respects, equals them. The characteristic in which they strike us as differing most remarkably from preceding architectural painting is their entire abandonment of the subdued tone of colour and the simplicity and severity of form hitherto thought essential in such kinds of decoration and the adoption of a style of colouring so brilliant as to make the walls look like the margin of a highly-illuminated manuscript. The eye, even when not directed to any of these pictures, is thus pleased with a voluptuous radiance of variegated tints, instead of being made dimly and unsatisfactorily conscious of something or other disturbing the uniformity of wall-surfaces. Those of our readers who have seen Mr. Rossetti's drawings in water-colours will comprehend that this must be the effect of a vast band of wall covered with paintings as nearly as possible in that style of colouring. Those who have not had that pleasure—and Mr. Rossetti's old crotchet of refusing to exhibit has made these the majority—must be content with a less perfect idea; for this painter, who has necessarily given his tone to the whole work, is among painters, what Mr. Butterfield is among architects—that is to say, among the most startlingly original living.

Original artists, in every kind, are almost always mannerists though it by no means follows that mannerists are original; and

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when the peculiar *mannerism* is added to the peculiar *style*—that invariable and essential accompaniment of the proof of genius—the result is a departure from the precedent as indescribable as it is complete. Mr. Rossetti, whom Mr. Ruskin has pronounced to be the only rival of Turner as a colourist, must at least be allowed, whether we admit that rivalry or not, to equal Turner in one of the noblest and least attainable qualities of harmonious colour—namely, its mysteriousness.

The apparition of the 'Damsel of the Sancgrael', surrounded with angels, on the wall of the Union, is a remarkable example of this mysteriousness. It is no skilful balance, according to academical rules or recipes—it is like the steam of rich, distilled perfumes, and affects the eye much as one of Mendelssohn's most unwordable 'Lieder ohne Worte' impresses the ear. The colour is as sweet, bright and pure, as that of the frailest waif of cloud in sunrise; and yet, if closely looked into, there is scarcely a square inch of all those hundred square feet of colour which has not half-a-dozen different tints in it. . . .

Mr. Morris's work, both in his picture and in his roof decoration, indicates a real feeling for peculiarly architectural painting. The sunflowers in his picture, and the flying water-fowl in that of Mr. Pollen, are striking examples of fine artistic power submitting to special material conditions, not only with a good grace, but with delight and profit to itself. . . .

We must not forget to mention that the painting of the Union room is, on the part of all persons concerned, entirely a labour of love. As is often the case with such labours, its success will probably render it, in the long run, a good investment of time and pains.

Patmore also had his growing family sketched and drawn by members of the P.R.B. Milnes, his eldest son, was drawn by Millais. Tennyson Patmore, his second son, was drawn by Holman Hunt, as was also his daughter Emily Honoria, and John Brett made a portrait of his wife Emily in 1859. This portrait, which is reproduced in this book, is little known and hitherto unpublished.

Years later, looking back on these early days of the Pre-Raphaelites, Coventry Patmore wrote:

I was intimate with the Pre-Raphaelites when we were little more than boys together. They were all very simple, pure-minded, ignorant and confident. Millais was looked upon as in



TENNYSON PATMORE, Second Son of Coventry Patmore.
From a drawing by Holman Hunt, R.A.

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some sort the leader, but this I fancy was partly because he always had more command of money than the others who were very poor. They could not even have printed 'The Germ' without assistance. I well remember Millais triumphantly flourishing before my eyes a cheque for £150 which he got for *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*. Once I was at a gathering of the Brethren and their friends, when Holman Hunt produced forty sketches and said that any one might have them for a pound a piece. I suppose that a hundred pounds a piece would scarcely have bought them a short time afterwards. About this time, Rossetti sold a little drawing of a boy and girl dancing before Borgia for £5. Lord Houghton commissioned me to try if I could get it for £100 a little while after.

Looking back in his old age, he sums up the Brethren according to his changed opinions, with cruel detachment. It all seems so far away now, those days when they were young, and all so very simple, pure-minded, ignorant and confident. The rebels have been transformed. Millais has become President of the Royal Academy. Holman Hunt has painted his famous *Light of the World* and Rossetti has triumphed, and scandalised the world by his love for Elizabeth Siddall and her suicide.

What were these men he knew so well in his youth? Looking back, he sees them in a clear impersonal light, perhaps almost too harsh in its judgment:

Holman Hunt attracted me personally more than any of the other Pre-Raphaelites. He was heroically simple and constant in his purpose of primarily serving religion by his art, and had a quixotic notion that it was absolutely obligatory upon him to redress every wrong that came under his notice. This mistake sometimes brought him into serious trouble, and more than once into danger of his life.

Rossetti was in manner, mind and appearance completely Italian. He had very little knowledge of or sympathy with English Literature, and always gave me the impression of tensity rather than intensity. Woolner was and is a brilliant talker and letter-writer. He has greatly injured his worldly prospects by his habit of always saying in the strongest words what is uppermost in his mind; but he is nearly always right.

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Finally, he considers Millais, who was the most worldly and successful of the Brethren :

Millais' conversation and personality were not striking, except as being in strong contrast with his vigour and refinement as an artist. From the beginning he felt and exhibited a boyish delight in worldly success and popularity.

CHAPTER TEN

The Angel in the House

‘I TREMBLE in mind when I think of the fortune which I enjoy . . . The most noble and lovely of women for my wife: three of the prettiest children ever seen: health made delightful by preceding years of languor, and, hard at hand, worldly honour and prosperity’—so writes Coventry Patmore to his wife in 1855.

The young poet was now father of three children—two sons, Milnes, born in 1848, and Tennyson born in 1850, and one daughter, Emily Honoria, born in 1853. There is little official record of these happy days of his married life.

We catch glimpses of the young couple at a party given by Bryan Waller Procter, where ‘Alfred Tennyson scarcely spoke to anyone but her (Emily Patmore), to the apparent envy and surprise of certain great ladies, who evidently thought so splendid a beauty with so milk-maid-like an absence of pretension was contrary to the usages’.

We hear of the young couple moving restlessly from one house to another. First they are at Highgate, then at Kentish Town. Later they are living at Elm Cottage, Hampstead, and yet again they are in rooms at 14, Percy Street, near Bedford Square. No. 3 Mount Vernon, a charming early Victorian cottage, still in existence, is yet another address given in some of Emily Patmore’s letters.

Serenely calm, Emily moved her ever-growing family from one home to another, and her loving husband proudly records the ‘gem-like neatness and order of her house’.

He was still working every day at the British Museum Library, but he was also hard at work on a long poem, *Tamerlane Church Tower*, which he was writing as a preliminary experiment and exercise prior to undertaking the more ambitious poem which was later to appear as *The Angel in the House*.

The ‘three prettiest children in the world’ were indeed very

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attractive if we can judge from contemporary drawings. Holman Hunt's of my grandfather, Tennyson Patmore, reveals a charming curly-headed little boy with eager and intelligent young eyes, and a full sensuous mouth.

Both Coventry Patmore and his wife were intensely interested in their children. Their letters to them show a passionate desire to love them and to educate them according to the best Victorian principles of the day. Emily Patmore, as beffited an intellectual woman, had very definite ideas about education. She wrote stories for various juvenile magazines, and it is recorded that one of them—*The Runaway Boy*—was refused by all publishers because in it she showed such sympathy and understanding for children's troubles and all their naughtiness that it was thought such a story would only encourage young readers to follow the hero's example and run away too. She also wrote 'Nursery Rhymes' under the pseudonym of 'Mrs. Motherly' and collaborated with her husband in collecting an anthology called *The Children's Garland*. In compiling this little book, the parents adopted the unusual procedure of first trying out all the poems they chose on their own children.

The children of a genius usually grow up in a strange atmosphere, and Coventry Patmore's children were no exception. From their parents' letters, they emerge as strange, wistful little creatures, somewhat precocious, and one of them, Emily, unmistakably brilliant. Brought up in an intensely literary home, they do not seem to have mixed much with other children. Instead, at an early age, they were taught to be quiet whilst their father worked away upstairs. In childish wonder they witnessed the moods and temperament of a poet—those unaccountable moods that one day would turn the whole world into sunshine, and on another cover their universe in gloom and despair. So long as their mother was alive they were happy, but her untimely death in 1862 was to leave them motherless at the very time they needed her most.

At present, the family life was free from this shadow. Soon it was time for the two boys—Milnes and Tennyson—to go to school. Some of Emily Patmore's letters written to my grandfather whilst he was away at school survive, and they show her as a charming affectionate parent, eager that her children should grow up 'simple, truthful and honourable'.

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But the halcyon days were drawing to a close. Emily Patmore, unknowingly, was overtaxing her strength. She was a miraculous housekeeper, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to feed and clothe an ever-growing family on her husband's very slender income. The family grew very quickly too. Soon there were three more children—two more daughters, Bertha and Gertrude, and, lastly, another son—Henry.

However, the exquisite harmony of her marriage compensated her for all other troubles. Perhaps this love was too intimate, too perfect to last for ever. Like all young lovers, these two were destined to many separations, which only served to draw them closer to each other, and to strengthen their interest in each other's work.

In 1850, she went away with one of her children, and she wrote to her husband :

It requires separation to keep up the mere romance of love . . . I daresay we shall find through our whole lives that we shall fancy the romance is gone whenever we have been together for twelve months; whereas, a week's parting will bring it back directly, however old we may be. I can quite well imagine you kissing a long grey hair when I am a grandmother. If only we can be good Christians, we must go on loving each other more and more.

And again she wrote:

I have been trying to get some 'Ideas' for you [for 'The Angel'] but have only found one, and that a bad one I fear, as the fruit of a morning's thought.

In reply, her husband writes :

Oh! how I long for Monday afternoon, when I shall come home, and find the house with the spirit in it that makes it home. . . . In all you do you are like an angel in Heaven, where, as Dante says, 'everything is done zealously and well'.

And on another day :

Love and Money [the title of a tale she had written] is now the order of the day with us. It reads capitally. Such real, un-

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affected writing is not common with the best modern writers. You ought really to do something. We might then go down to posterity as a 'double star', whereas now all your light will be swallowed up in mine. *The Happy Wedding* will really be far more yours than mine, but that will never be known unless you let the world see what you can do if you like.

With rare insight, Emily Patmore understood how important his work was to him, and she even made big sacrifices so that he could finish his great poem in untroubled peace. This, *The Happy Wedding*, was the first idea of a title for *The Angel in the House*. She let their house, and lived in furnished rooms in order to save their money; yet she could not resist writing to him whilst he was away working:

Sometimes, I almost wish that something would interfere with our letting the house after all. . . . Nothing but the recollection of your Poem makes me reasonable again. Indeed you ought to work very hard when your wife makes such a great sacrifice for the sake of enabling you to do it. You have almost reason to be jealous of the Poem when you find I will give you up for it.

Another time, Patmore, whilst staying at Hastings where they had spent their honeymoon, writes:

The pleasure which the presence of the great sea always gives me was strangely modified and made into something much like melancholy by the recollection that you were not there.

Another day he writes from the same town:

The great magnolia at the top of the High Street, which was in flower when you were here, is without blossoms now, and really to my heart it seems as if it were because you are not here. . . .

The people of the house here seem like my dear friends because they have seen and spoken to you . . .

Suddenly, in the middle of all this happiness, the dreadful unexpected happened. In 1857, while Emily Patmore was nursing one of her children, she neglected a cold. This proved

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to be the beginning of her mortal illness—for she developed consumption. She had never been strong, and now the disease took hold of her with such force that although everything was done to cure it, it eventually proved fatal.

She had five more years to live, but life was suddenly different. Doctors ordered her to try various health resorts. She was forced to leave her large family of children at frequent intervals, and to arrange for them to be boarded out with different friends. At first her illness did not appear dangerous. Her loving husband had even hopes of her total recovery. But these sudden relapses in her health filled him with fear and anguish, and in 1861, when his wife seems at last out of danger he notes in his Diary.

Memoranda, for thanksgiving. For her wonderful restoration to my prayers. For the great increase of our love through the many active proofs and exercise of love produced by her long danger. For the greater and more sensible tenderness which the precarious tenure of her life causes between us.

And he adds, when he has lost her: 'Thank God! I did not wait for Death to show me the value of my Treasure.'

But this is anticipating events. In 1854, 'worldly honour and prosperity' seemed close at hand, because in this year Coventry Patmore published the first part of *The Angel in the House* under the title of *The Betrothal*. So that Fate allowed Emily Patmore to witness the fruits of the work and struggle of the early years of their married life.

The Betrothal, a modest grey-bound volume published by John W. Parker, and now a great rarity, appeared anonymously.

Peter George Patmore, who had returned unobtrusively to England some years earlier after the débâcle of the Railway Shares, now unwittingly jeopardised the success of his son's most important work. He had recently published his own three volumes of reminiscences *My Friends and Acquaintances*, and despite the fact that these volumes contain much that is excellent, the book had been violently mauled by the Press. The scandal of the duel had not been forgotten, and some injudicious comments on Campbell, and a panegyric in favour of R. Plumer

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Ward, roused the critics' wrath. This praise of the novelist showed his literary discrimination—for the author of *Tremaine, or The Man of Refinement, De Vere, or The Man of Independence, Chatsworth, and De Clifford, or The Constant Man* was amongst the most remarkable of the early nineteenth-century novelists. Although almost forgotten to-day, except for discerning critics like Mr. Michael Sadleir, Robert Plumer Ward exercised a direct and powerful influence on Disraeli and Bulwer Lytton, and both writers acknowledged their debt to the older novelist. However, all the above facts were sufficient excuse for the onslaught. A year later, Peter George Patmore died on Christmas Day.

Coventry Patmore, whilst still devoted to his father, was frightened by the Press attacks on the name of Patmore, and decided to issue *The Betrothal* under the pseudonym of 'C. K. Dighton' and actually had the title-page printed accordingly. Finally, it appeared with no name at all.

All his literary friends received the new poem with rapture. Emily Patmore was overjoyed, and she wrote proudly to Mrs. Gemmer, an old friend of the family :

I am commissioned by Coventry to send you a copy of his new poem of which he begs your acceptance. He had told me to send it, curiously enough, the very day I got your letter, in which 'you hope you may come across it'. You must forgive my vanity if I tell you a few of the great things that have been said about it.

W. S. Landor writes a letter full of somewhat senile ecstasy, which I will not quote. Carlyle calls on Coventry to quit the field of fiction and bring his powers to bear on the world of fact, which, for the want of the like of him is what it is—this, I mean a propos of power displayed in this book. Ruskin writes 'I cannot tell you how much I like your book. I had no idea you had this high kind of power. The book will be, or at least ought to be, one of the most popular in the English language, and blessedly popular, doing good wherever it goes'. Tennyson writes: 'You have begun an immortal poem, and if I am no false prophet, it will not be long in winning its way into the hearts of the people.'

I quote from memory, but I am not far wrong. A friend of Tennyson, Aubrey de Vere, himself a poet, writes in the same tone, and adds, 'Alfred said to me' (he was with Tennyson when

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he received the book) 'That your poem when finished, will add one to the very small number of great poems which the world has had.' Do not laugh at my boasting. I have not copied these same things for *anyone* before, but somehow I feel as if you would sympathise with me in the pleasure they have caused me.

The general critical press did not respond so enthusiastically, and few copies were sold. It was even parodied in the *Athenaeum*. Patmore was bitterly disappointed, and wrote to Monckton Milnes :

I sincerely hope that your presages of success may be fulfilled, chiefly because there are five books yet to come to complete the poem, and, though I could go on composing contentedly enough and confidently enough, *publishing* is a different matter, and I have made up my mind to stop at the *third* failure.

However, despite an unresponsive press, the poem began to attract attention.

Emerson, who had met Coventry Patmore through their common friend, Henry Sutton, did much to further its popularity in the United States. Some time after its publication, he wrote to Patmore:

I think there never was so sudden a public formed for itself by any poem as here exists for *The Angel in the House*, which was read and published by acclamation of a few, before yet anyone had heard or guessed the name of the author; and since our edition was out is known and loved and recited by young and old, an ever enlarging company.

I give you joy and thanks as the maker of this beautiful poem, and pray you to make no delay and print the promised 'Espousals'. I try to give myself importance among my friends as one who has known the author and has owed him valued attentions.

Another eminent American admirer of the poem was Nathaniel Hawthorne. In his *English Note-Books* he writes:

On Thursday (Jan. 3, 1858) we had the pleasure of a call from Mr Coventry Patmore, to whom Dr. Wilkinson gave me a letter of introduction, and on whom I had called twice at the

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British Museum, without finding him. We had read his *Betrothal* and *Angel in the House* with unusual pleasure and sympathy, and, therefore, were very glad to make his personal acquaintance. He is a man of much more youthful aspect than I expected—a slender person to be an Englishman, though not remarkably so, had he been an American—with an intelligent, pleasant and sensitive face, a man very evidently of refined feelings and cultivated mind. He is very simple and agreeable in his manners: a little shy, yet perfectly frank, and easy to meet on real grounds. He said that his wife had purposed to come with him, and had, indeed, accompanied him to town, but was kept away. We were very sorry for this, because Mr. Patmore seems to acknowledge her as the real 'Angel in the House' although he says she herself ignores all connection with the poem. It is well for her to do so, and for her husband to feel that the character is her real portrait; and both, I suppose, are right. It is a most beautiful and original poem—a poem for happy married people to read together, and to understand by the light of their own past and present life, but I doubt whether the generality of English people are capable of appreciating it. I told Mr. Patmore that I thought his popularity in America would be greater than at home, and he said that it was already so; and he appeared to estimate highly his American fame, and also our general gift of quicker and more subtle recognition of genius than the English public. . . . He took his leave, shaking hands with us all because he saw that we were his own people, recognising him as a true poet. . . .

It is an interesting fact that rumours of the poem's great transatlantic success later helped it to popularity in England. In 1858, the powerful *Edinburgh Review* eventually set the seal of public approval on the poem with an important article by Aubrey de Vere. Soon the book began to sell in thousands, and at Coventry Patmore's death it was estimated that the total sale had exceeded a quarter of a million copies. At one time, it was the only rival of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

It is not the aim of this book to deal with Coventry Patmore's work and position as a poet, so I do not propose to give a detailed analysis of this well-known, but no longer read, poem.

The Angel in the House was published in two parts; *The Betrothal* in 1854, and *The Espousals* in 1856; it is written in octosyllabic quatrains, and before each of the cantos which tell the

The Angel in the House

story is a series of preludes, treating of love in general. The story is of Felix Vaughan and his love and courtship of the Dean's daughter, Honoria Churchill, with her rejected suitor, Frederick Graham, coming in only at the beginning and the end.

The sequel, now called by one title, *The Victories of Love*, was also first published in two parts; *Faithful for Ever* in 1860, and *The Victories of Love*, serially in *Macmillan's Magazine*, from September to November, 1861, and in book form, expanded and revised, in 1863. This sequel is in octosyllabic couplets. Its story is chiefly that of Frederick Graham and his wife, Jane. The story is told in letters exchanged between all the chief characters in both stories.

It has been the literary fashion to mock at *The Angel in the House* and to prefer Coventry Patmore's later work published in the volume called *The Unknown Eros*. Yet no sincere student of the poet's work can afford to ignore this epic of married love. For cunningly hidden away in this mid-Victorian story in verse is the basis of all Patmore's philosophy of love and his very personal solution to the way of living. As Frederick Page observes shrewdly:

The Angel in the House, then, is conscious love, uniting its subject and object, Man, Woman, God. The House is the Body, but also the literal house, the Englishman's castle, in defence of which Patmore, at a time of French aggressiveness, was active in promoting Rifle Clubs, and he says that he was prouder of this than anything else except his idyll *Amelia* . . . Patmore was not a mystical poet first and a political Englishman afterwards, but both together.

It is also the poet's 'Epithalamium' to his wife, Emily. This poem, so intensely of its age, embodying all the virtues and the faults of the mid-Victorian era, marks the happiest moments in his life. Never again was he to write with such buoyant happiness and confidence. For his own marriage had proved what he maintained (in the words of Osbert Burdett) that 'marriage was not the end nor anti-climax of love, but its fulfilment; and he showed (in *The Angel in the House*) as none had shown before him, that within its narrow circle, and because of its limitations, it was capable of delights, and discoveries,

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more wonderful than the extravagant adventures of *Don Juan*.'

Despite the monotony of the octosyllabic quatrains, which he chose deliberately as best suited to the everyday subject of marriage, the poem remains a *tour-de-force*. It is full of quite unexpected beauties, and there are psychological passages in the preludes in which the various phases of love are analysed with extraordinary insight. But it must be admitted that the Victorian décor, despite its nostalgic charm, is heavy and wearisome to the modern reader. In his emphasis on realism, Patmore overloaded his canvas with trivial details, and these obscure the fine poetical passages.

Many years ago, in an attempt to make a new assessment of Patmore's poetry I published a selection of extracts from the poem together with his later verse*. These extracts refute the charges made against *The Angel in the House*, and show that he was a real poet even during his most popular phase. The whole poem also points the way to the later works in which the poet, having lost his earthly love, was to explore the mysteries of the Divine.

Take the opening section of *The Espousals* entitled *The Cathedral Close*:

Once more I came to Sarum Close,
With joy half memory, half desire,
And breathed the sunny wind that rose
And blew the shadows o'er the Spire,
And toss'd the lilac's scented plumes,
And sway'd the chestnut's thousand cones,
And fill'd my nostrils with perfumes,
And shaped the clouds in waifs and zones,
And wafted down the strain
Of Sarum Bells, when, true to time,
I reached the Dean's, with heart and brain
That trembled to the trembling chime.
'Twas half my home, six years ago.
The six years had not alter'd it:
Red-brick and ashlar, long and low,
With dormers and with orielis lit.

**Selected Poems of Coventry Patmore*, edited by Derek Patmore, 'Phoenix Library', Chatto & Windus, 1931. Now re-issued by the Grey Walls Press.

The Angel in the House

Geranium, lychnis, rose array'd
The windows, all wide open thrown;
And some one in the Study play'd
The Wedding-March of Mendelssohn.
And there it was I last took leave:
'Twas Christmas: I remember'd now
The cruel girls, who feign'd to grieve,
Took down the evergreens, and how
The laurel into blazes woke
The fire, lighting the large, low room,
A dim, rich lustre of old oak
And crimson velvet's glowing gloom.

Or take another beautiful passage where the hero sees his beloved dancing at 'The County Ball'. Here the atmosphere of the period is caught with rare perception and grace. One can almost hear the strains of the band playing the waltz in the background as the crinolined figures sway with their partners round the floor of the ballroom, and the chandeliers light the scene with a soft radiance:

But there danced she, who from the leaven
Of ill preserved my heart and wit
All unawares, for she was heaven,
Others at best but fit for it.
One of those lovely things she was
In whose least action there can be
Nothing so transient but it has
An air of immortality.
I mark'd her step, with peace elate,
Her brow more beautiful than morn,
Her sometime look of girlish state
Which sweetly waived its right to scorn;
The giddy crowd, she grave the while,
Although, as 'twere beyond her will,
Around her mouth the baby smile,
That she was born with, linger'd still.
Her ball-dress seem'd a breathing mist,
From the fair form exhaled and shed,
Raised in the dance with arm and wrist
All warmth and light, unbraceleted.
Her motion, feeling 'twas beloved,
The pensive soul of tune express'd,

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And, oh, what perfume, as she moved,
Came from the flowers in her breast!
How sweet a tongue the music had!
'Beautiful Girl,' it seem'd to say,
Though all the world were vile and sad,
'Dance on; let innocence be gay,'
Ah, none but I discern'd her looks,
When in the throng she pass'd me by,
For love is like a ghost, and brooks
Only the chosen seer's eye;
And who but she could e'er divine
The halo and the happy trance,
When her bright arm reposed on mine
In all the pauses of the dance!

Whatever its faults and virtues may be, this poem occupies a unique position in Victorian letters. When he received the poem, Tennyson wrote to Patmore, after pointing out minor criticism, 'but as for the whole, I admire it exceedingly, and trust it will do our age good, and not ours only. The women ought to subscribe for a statue for you. . . .'

And these words from the man he most admired must have compensated Patmore for the poor reception accorded to his most ambitious work.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Tennyson—the Friend

In Tennyson I perceive a nature higher and wider than my own; at the feet of which I can sit happily and with love. . . .

Coventry Patmore, writing to Emily Patmore,

Ambleside, August, 1850.

A CONSPIRACY of silence surrounds the friendship of Tennyson and Coventry Patmore. Most of the biographers pass over the subject. The two poets themselves never saw each other in later life, and all documents that would have thrown light on what must have been one of the most interesting friendships of the Victorian era have been destroyed. This is unfortunate, for it was a great friendship while it lasted, and Tennyson exerted a profound influence over all Patmore's early work and in particular over *The Angel in the House*.

The only biographer who has attempted to unravel the mystery of this veiled and much-discussed friendship is Mr. Harold Nicolson, whose study, *Tennyson*, is one of the most brilliant books of its kind. But even he cannot prove his suppositions for lack of documents, and many of his ideas on the subject remain unpublished. However, two facts are certain. Both Tennyson and Coventry Patmore burnt all their intimate private letters dealing with their friendship; and it was a passionate and deeply-felt relationship on both sides whilst it lasted.*

Coventry Patmore first met Tennyson in the winter of 1845. He was then a young man of twenty-two, and had published his first poems the year before. Basil Champneys thinks that this meeting probably took place at the Procters' house.

Tennyson was thirty-six, and sunk deep in what Harold Nicolson in his book calls 'The Ten Years Silence'. His repu-

*Due to his access to the Tennyson papers, Mr. Nicolson has given me much valuable information, and this chapter owes much to his help and interest.

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tation, after a brilliant beginning with the poems published in 1830, had suffered an almost total eclipse caused by bitter attacks on the second volume of verse published in 1832. Led by Christopher North in *Blackwood's Magazine*, the attacks had grown in the press until Lockhart published his review in *The Quarterly*: and, as Mr. Nicolson writes,

it must be remembered that at that date *The Quarterly* for most people was second only to God's Bible, and its opinions constituted an authority which no man or woman of culture could ignore.

His friend, Arthur Hallam, had died many years before in 1833, but still remained a distracting memory. Tennyson was sad, bewildered and alone. Patmore was young, admiring and enthusiastic.

Without being extravagantly handsome, he was still very attractive, with his slim boyish figure and the long auburn hair that fell poetically about his finely-shaped head. Tennyson, in his turn, possessed all the qualities that would attract the younger man. Carlyle described him in a letter to Emerson at this period as

One of the finest looking men in the world. A great shock of rough, dusky dark hair; bright laughing hazel eyes; massive aquiline face. Most massive yet most delicate; of sallow brown complexion, almost Indian-looking, clothes cynically loose, free and easy, smokes infinite tobacco. His voice is musical, metallic, fit for loud laughter and piercing wail, and all that lies between: speech and speculation free and plenteous. I do not meet in these late decades such company over a pipe!

Both men, despite the difference in their temperaments, felt isolated and alone. In 1845 Patmore was still a struggling young bachelor trying to earn a living by chance journalism, and had not yet received his appointment at the British Museum. It will be remembered that it was the publication of Tennyson's poems in 1842 that influenced the younger man to adopt poetry as a career, and at this period Patmore already considered Tennyson as 'the great poet of the day'. So it is not surprising that the friendship soon developed into intimacy.

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One could almost suppose that in the new-found companionship of this unusually brilliant young poet, Tennyson discovered some reminder of an even greater friendship—his undying love for Hallam.

The two new friends met constantly. Tennyson was in a very neurotic condition. He was morbidly sensitive to any criticism. But his young friend was all sympathy and admiration. He would humour the nocturnal moods of the older man when restlessness drove him out into the night, and they would go for long walks through the city, sometimes prolonging them into the early morning. Coventry was happy. He was content to sit at the feet of the man he admired most—for in Tennyson he 'perceived a nature higher and wider' than his own, and he felt that 'it is a great good to me to find that I have my superior, which I have never found in the company of anyone else'.

Patmore related to Gosse that, during these midnight walks,

Tennyson often sank into a sort of gloomy reverie, which would fall upon him, in Keats' phrase—'Sudden from heaven, like a weeping cloud', and put a stop to all conversation. While they walked the streets at night in endless perambulation, or while they sat together over a simple meal in a suburban tavern, Tennyson's dark eyes would suddenly be set as those of a man who sees a vision, and no further sound would pass his lips, perhaps for an hour.

Poor Tennyson! As Mr. Nicolson tells us in his book :

He was troubled by his health, which had indeed suffered from the port and the tobacco and the irregular meals; and his eyesight, which had been defective since the Cambridge days, was also causing him anxiety. So that the periods of acute nervous depression would recur upon occasions. They would descend at night-time when he was alone listening to the rain upon the roof, and drive him out into the cold dawn and up, alone, to Wimpole Street, where Hallam had lived.

Then I rise, the eavedrops fall,
And the yellow vapours choke
The great city sounding wide;
The day comes, a dull red ball

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Wrapt in drifts of lurid smoke
On the misty rivertide.
Thro' the hubbub of the market
I steal, a wasted frame,
It crosses here, it crosses there,
Thro' all that crowd confused and loud,
The shadow still the same;
And on my eyelids,
My anguish hangs like shame.

The friendship was at its height between the years 1845 and 1852. Tennyson was at work on *In Memoriam*, and we know from various contemporaries that Patmore was one of the first of Tennyson's friends to hear portions of the poem. In 1850, William Michael Rossetti records that Patmore had in his possession 'one of some half-dozen of Tennyson's Elegies that have been printed strictly for private perusal'. And in the same year, Patmore was responsible for saving the whole manuscript from being lost.

Tennyson was away at the Isle of Wight, and he wrote to his young friend :

My dear Coventry,

I went up to my room yesterday to get my Book of Elegies: you know what I mean, a long butcher-ledger-like book, I was going to read one or two to an artist here. I could not find it. I have some obscure remembrance of having lent it to you: if so, all is well: if not, will you go to my old chambers and institute a rigorous inquiry? I was coming up to-day to look after it, but as the weather is so furious I have yielded to the wishes of my friends to stop until to-morrow. I shall be, I expect, in town to-morrow at 25 M.P. when I shall be glad to see you. . . .

Believe me ever yours,

A. Tennyson.

Patmore has left his own account of how, obeying Tennyson's instruction, he rescued the manuscript:

Tennyson had lodgings up two pair of stairs, in Mornington Place, Hampstead Road, and I, who was lately married, lived hard by. We used to dine together two or three times a week. He often read me bits of *In Memoriam*, then unpublished. After

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he had left his lodgings three or four weeks, I received a letter from where he was staying in the country asking me to go to his old lodging and recover the manuscript of *In Memoriam*—a long thin volume like a butcher's account book. He had left it in a closet in which he kept his tea and bread-and-butter. The landlady assured me that no such book had been left there, and objected to my going to see; but I insisted, and, pushing by her, ran upstairs and found the manuscript. Tennyson afterwards gave this volume to Sir John Simeon, to whom also I gave the letter asking me to look for it.

When Patmore married in 1847, it made no difference to his friendship with Tennyson. Indeed it served only to strengthen it, for Tennyson had a warm appreciation and affection for Emily Patmore. Moreover, when he himself married three years later, Patmore was one of the first to be introduced to Emily Tennyson. He was invited to Tent Lodge, in Westmoreland, where the Tennysons were living.

My dear Coventry, [writes Tennyson]

We shall certainly be here some weeks longer, and *very* glad to see you if you come: it will be as well, however, for you to give me some little notice before you come, as if you don't I may not be at home, but on Crummock Lake, or Buttermere, or Heaven knows where. We have but rough accommodation here at present, but by the time you come I hope we shall be better off. I have no books which is a bore. Love to Mrs. P.

Ever yours,

A. Tennyson.

As Coventry Patmore was not feeling well and expecting his wife to have another child—which was born on August 9th, 1850, and named after his friend as Tennyson Patmore—Tennyson wrote solicitously:

My wife will take care of you if you are unwell. I am very sorry to hear that you are. Come as soon after the birth as you can. I wish you had been content with one.

Three letters written by Patmore to his wife from Coniston, where he was staying with the Tennysons in 1850, show how strong the ties were between the two men:

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Ambleside, Aug. 1850.

Dearest,

I like Mrs. Tennyson more and more every day. She seems to like me, as she talks more freely than a woman of such character would without considerable faith in her hearers. Yesterday it was too wet to go to church, and Tennyson read Prayers, lessons and a sermon by Maurice. The more I talk with him, the more I discover that he has given a defective notion of his faith in *In Memoriam*. He was far above all the pantheistic 'religious faculty' humbug that taints so many half-genii in this day; and I am sure he would be horrified if he knew that any such men had been led by *In Memoriam* to count him as a fellow heathen. . . .

Another day he writes:

Dearest,

Nothing can be pleasanter than everything here. Tennyson is not writing just now, so that he gives all his time to amusing himself and us. Yesterday we were out almost all day upon the Lake. I find rowing capital exercise. I gave Tennyson Allingham's volume yesterday. A. would have had his head quite turned if he could have heard and seen Tennyson reading *Evening*, *The Serenade*, *The Pilot's Daughter* aloud among the water-lilies of the Lake. You know how much Allingham thinks of having his verses read in appropriate places and times. I was quite jealous of Tennyson's admiration of them . . . We dine at two o'clock, after which the most delightful *tête-à-tête* with Tennyson over his wife for two or three hours. You know what inestimable value I always attach to conversations with him. Imagine how rich I think myself now. After dinner, we go out (mind you I generalise from two days' experience) again till dark, and after tea Tennyson reads aloud, or we talk till half-past ten and eleven. Yesterday, Tennyson said a great deal about you. He said he had never seen anything so enchanting as your innocence and simplicity of manner and mind. Do you not think yourself happy at having got among the poets?

Again he writes:

Mrs. Tennyson seems to be a very charming person, and I have already seen enough of her to feel that any description of her from a short acquaintance is sure to be unjust. Her manners

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are perfectly simple and lady-like, and she has that high cultivation which is found only in the upper classes in the country, and there very seldom. She has instruction and intellect enough to make the stock-in-trade of half-a-dozen literary ladies; but she is neither brilliant nor literary at all. Tennyson has made no hasty or ill-judged choice. She seems to understand him thoroughly, and without the least ostentation or officiousness of affection, waits upon and attends to him as she ought to do . . . there is a boat belonging to the house, and last night Tennyson rowed me half way down the lake. . . .

Back in London, the younger man, proud of his friendship with the poet, brought his most brilliant contemporaries to meet Tennyson. He introduced the young Pre-Raphaelite Brethren, and we read how Dante Gabriel Rossetti first met Tennyson, in Rossetti's own words:

In 1850 [he writes] I ventured to send my first volume of verse to Tennyson. I don't think he wrote to me, but I heard incidentally that he thought well of it; and during a subsequent visit to London (in 1852 perhaps) Coventry Patmore, to my boundless joy, proposed to take me to call on the great poet, then not long married, and living at Twickenham. We were admitted, shown upstairs, and soon a tall and swarthy man came in, with loose dark hair and beard, very near-sighted, shook hands cordially, yet with a profound quietude of manner; immediately afterwards asked us to dine. I stayed.

Other Pre-Raphaelites whom Patmore introduced were Millais, who soon began illustrating Tennyson's poems, and Thomas Woolner, who became a special intimate of the Tennyson circle, and executed the bust of Tennyson which is now in Trinity College Library at Cambridge.

In the meantime, the two Emilys became fast friends. They exchange happy domestic letters. They inquire affectionately about each other's children. The Tennysons had become god-parents to the Patmores' second son, and on August 12th, 1852, Tennyson writes the following letter to Emily Patmore:

I know that your kind womanly heart will rejoice in hearing that it is all over. She had a very easy confinement, and was delivered of what the nurse calls a 'fine boy'* yesterday. We

*Hallam Tennyson.

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are keeping her very quiet according to advice, but as soon as she can see anybody, she would be glad to see you. She was so anxious that the little godson should have the cup on his birthday (for it was her thought, not mine) that there was no time to write and inquire the exact initials, and get them engraved. . . .

Later on, we find the Patmores staying at Farringford. Emily Patmore, helping to gather materials for *The Idylls of the King*, and writing to Allingham says:

Mrs. Tennyson's two boys are sweet children. . . . Mr. Tennyson has read me two magnificent new poems on subjects from the times of Prince Arthur. They are really magnificent.

And Emily Tennyson writes:

I cannot bear to think of Mr. Patmore and yourself toiling away for us. I do hope we may get a copy of Geraint of Erbyn, and so stop you. It is the Elegy on Geraint Ally wants, you know. . . . Pray, pray do not overwork yourselves. You belong to each other and your children first of all remember, and you both have a great deal to do of your own work.

In his turn, Tennyson helps Coventry Patmore with his poem *The Angel in the House*. He advises the younger poet and corrects certain imperfect lines. We hear of Aubrey de Vere and Tennyson reading an advance copy of the poem on the cliffs of the Isle of Wight, and greatly enjoying it, and Tennyson writes to his friend:

Many thanks for your volumes. I still hold that you have written a poem which has a fair chance of immortality; tho' I have praised (Landor-like) so many poems that perhaps my praise may not be thought much of: but such as it is, accept it, for it is quite sincere. There are passages want smoothing here and there; such as,

‘Her power makes not defeats but pacts’
A line that seems to me hammered out of old nail-heads. Others want correcting on another score as—

‘I slid
My curtain’

which is not English. You mean I made my curtain slide and

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that (even so exprest) would not be good. There is nothing for it but—

‘I drew my curtain’.

Many reasons have been put forward why this friendship did not last. I think the answer is easy to discover. Coventry Patmore was too definite a personality to remain for ever subjected to Tennyson’s influence, and Tennyson demanded complete subjection from his friends. He could not tolerate criticism of any kind.

Even in 1855, Patmore could write to his friend Allingham about Tennyson’s *Maud*:

What do you think of the gratuitous slight put upon you and me in Kingsley’s notice of *Maud*? I would not change *Tamerton Church Tower* nor (if I were the author of it) the *Music Master* for fifty *Mauds*. Tennyson has made a hideous mistake in publishing it; and I should have told him my mind about it (as far as in civility I could) had he given me an opportunity. But he read me only a passage here and there, and his reading magnifies the *merit* of everything, it is so grand. One or two of the love passages are, to my mind, exquisite.

And again in 1851, he can write to Allingham and say:

Mrs Tennyson has had a son born dead; I am very sorry for this, as I think the sooner Tennyson has a few children about him the better it will be for his mental health and comfort.

But whatever his private views about the poet, Patmore never wavered in his public avowal of Tennyson’s genius. He was a frequent reviewer of Tennyson’s poetry although, strangely enough, the latter was unaware of this fact—as the reviews were unsigned. Writing of *In Memoriam* he said:

The greater part is like a clearing sky, half azure and half obscured by clouds—some dark, but most of them dashed with fragments of rainbow.

And of *Maud*:

About the love-strain which we have called the soul of the

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poem the other parts range themselves like pitchy clouds about the moon, to the great increase of its loveliness and their own obscurity.

As the years went by and the bitter memory of the estrangement remained, Patmore became more mordant on the subject, and describing his former friend in a private memorandum he wrote:

Tennyson is like a great child, very simple and very much self-absorbed. I never heard him make a remark of his own which was worth repeating, yet I always left him with a mind and heart enlarged. In any other man his incessant dwelling upon trifles concerning himself, generally small injuries—real or imaginary—would be very tiresome. He has a singular incapacity for receiving at first hand, and upon its merits, any new idea. He pooh-poohed my views on architecture when I first put them before him; but some time afterwards Emerson praised them to him very strongly, and the next time I saw Tennyson he praised them strongly too, without any allusion to his former speech of them. I was with Tennyson and Thackeray a day or two after T's appointment to be Laureate. Thackeray congratulated him, adding 'A Laureate indeed without guile'. T. told me that the office had been previously offered to and declined by Rogers and Sheridan Knowles.

Among Tennyson's works, the second of the two little volumes published in 1842, contains, to my thinking, the greater part of all that is *essential* in his writings. It bears to them the same relation that Keats's little volume issued in 1820 does to all else he wrote. . . . Tennyson's best work, though in its way a miracle of grace and finish, is never of quite the highest kind. It is not finished *within*. Compare the finish of 'Kubla Khan' with that of the 'Palace of Art'.

If FitzGerald was cast out from Tennyson's friendship for declaring that some of Tennyson's later poems lacked something of the old 'champagne flavour', how could Patmore survive with his intensely critical and outspoken views?

The crisis in their friendship arose on Emily Patmore's death, when Tennyson entirely failed to satisfy what Patmore considered were the canons of friendship. Instead of trying to comfort the bereaved young husband, Tennyson left him

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severely alone. He did not even write to him. The only communication Patmore received was a letter from the Royal Literary Fund about an application made on his behalf by Mr. and Mrs. Tennyson, which hurt Patmore's pride, and had the misfortune to arrive, as Patmore wrote years afterwards to Tennyson, 'when my wife Emily was lying dead in my house'.

They never met again after Emily Patmore's death. In 1881, urged on by Woolner, Patmore wrote to Tennyson in an attempt to mend the breach. Tennyson's reply was frigid, and a few months later, when he received a copy of Patmore's *The Unknown Eros*, all he could write to his former friend was :

My dear Patmore,

Many thanks for your 'Unknown Eros' which reached me this morning.

Yours very truly,

A. Tennyson.

Their former great intimacy might never have existed. Their paths led them far apart. Tennyson had chosen worldly success. Coventry Patmore, a convert to Roman Catholicism, had turned his back on the public that had loved *The Angel in the House* and *The Idylls of the King*, and sought the remote peaks of mysticism.

And yet they both secretly regretted their lost friendship, for Tennyson's son told Basil Champneys that his father often wondered why Patmore had 'given him up'.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Departure

EMILY PATMORE was dying. By 1861, her husband knew that there was no hope of her ever recovering. Her ill-health made it necessary that her large family of six children should be divided, as she was not strong enough to look after all of them. So she remained in London with her two elder daughters, Emily and Bertha, whilst the other children were boarded out and sent to school. Meanwhile Coventry Patmore spent all the hours he could spare from the British Museum in visiting his separated families.

The progress of her illness was tormenting in its uncertainty. One month she would feel better, the next she would have a relapse and be even worse than before. Her husband was distracted. He was haunted by the thought that he would not have her with him many years more. Tragically, their great love for each other could not save her, and Coventry Patmore wrote to Allingham:

We were *too* comfortable before all this happened. Providence takes care to startle people out of the dream that this world is a place to be jolly in.

His slender income was over-taxed in meeting doctor's bills and the expenses of supporting his growing children. However, the devoted young couple seemed to bear all these troubles with unusual courage. The thought that they would probably be parted made their love even greater and more tender than when they were first married, and despite the cloud of sadness that hung over the family, there were many moments of exquisite harmony and domestic happiness.

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Friends did all they could to help them, as witness this charming letter from Coventry to his wife, describing the offer of John Brett, a young Pre-Raphaelite, to help them in their financial worries:

Finchley, Aug. 1860.

Dearest,

I had a letter from Brett insisting on your seeing Dr. Kidd, and saying that, as money could be our only objection, he also insisted on paying a fee for him to go down to see you: accordingly he enclosed £20.

Just think of the poor young painter's devotion to you. He will be my dearest friend to the end of my life. Of course, I shall call on Dr. Kidd, and he will say what all the doctors say, that your cure must be wrought by Nature. That will satisfy dear faithfull Brett, and I shall send him back his £20, which is most likely the greater part of all he had in the world. I am sure this ought to do you more good than the finest summer day. . . .

Good night. Pray for fine weather,

Coventry.

With the strange calm that falls on those who know they are to die, Emily Patmore quietly went about her domestic life. Pathetically she made all the preparations for death. Her great anxiety was her children. What would become of them? She made many notes and instructions for their guidance and upbringing after her departure, and even drew little sketches of the kind of clothes they should wear as they grew up. She went to Hendon churchyard and chose a place for her grave.

Day after day, lying at home on her day bed, she would scheme and worry about her family and her husband. She wrote tender little letters to her sons away at school, such as this one written to Tennyson Patmore:

Dear Tenny,

I am about the same as when you saw me. I shall soon have you by me, for leave day is in a week.

Monday was Emily's birthday, Aunt Georgie and little Eliza came and we had tea on the lawn. I was there too, Papa made me a sort of bed to lie on. Mrs. Jackson and her daughter are going on Saturday to stay with your godfather and godmother. I daresay they will tell him what a nice good-tempered little fellow you are.

Good-bye, pet.

Mamma.

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Another day, she would send him a little note illustrated with drawings in ink.

She also carried on a large correspondence with her friends Emily Tennyson and the poet Allingham.

Coventry and Emily Patmore were very proud of their children. An especial favourite was their eldest daughter, Emily Honoria, who was a remarkable little girl. When she was only two, the doting father wrote to his wife :

I never saw Baby looking so beautiful as she did yesterday. Such eyes! I declare I almost fell in love with them. Blue, square, and full of

'The strange look of baby state
Which sweetly waived its right too soon';

laughing, simple and yet searching, celestially mature though earthly infantine. She shall never marry with my consent if she looks so handsome.

And when she was four-and-a-half years old, her mother wrote :

Emily begins to read and write. She is very gentle and amiable. . . . Even now she amuses Baby in a room alone every Monday morning for three hours while I teach Tennyson, and the servants are washing. . . .

And in 1861 :

Emily reads French books alone for amusement, and can translate Telemachus with looking out a word every six or seven lines. She also gets up every morning, takes a cold sponge bath, and dresses herself and Bertha; all before I am awake. She prepares alone, I never see when, a page of translation, a page of vocabulary, and writes an exercise! Is that not good for a child of eight years old?

Aubrey de Vere, a friend of the Patmores at this time, has left an amusing anecdote about their intense interest in all that their children thought and did. He was visiting them one evening when :

Departure

A wonderful night had come to them, a night rare in our misty climate; one of those which breed a confusion among the constellations, but which may have suggested to the poet of 'The Seasons' the line—'Poured all the Arabian heaven upon their night!' . . . 'Our child must see it,' the poet exclaimed; 'it is worth while breaking her sleep for it. She will never forget it. She will see in it even more than we do! We must wait patiently for her earliest word!' The father snatched her [Emily] from her small bed: the mother wrapped the blanket carefully about her. They carried her into the garden. Slowly they drew the veil from her eyes. They stood in silence waiting for the oracular word. At last it came—it was this, 'Oh, papa, how untidy the sky is!'

While Emily looked after the girls of the family, Coventry tried to help his eldest son, Milnes, cram for his naval examinations. In 1862, his wife writes to tell Mrs. Jackson why they cannot visit her:

He has asked me to explain to you more fully about the difficulty of leaving Milnes. We are extremely anxious that he should pass in March. We shall have no peace of mind till the point is settled and all Coventry's work too will stand still. . . . As there are only about twenty-eight working days before the March examination, and Coventry teaches Milnes three hours every evening you will see that an evening missed would be a serious loss; indeed Coventry looks upon it as a distinct duty to give himself entirely to this work for the next month. . . .

One cannot help feeling sorry for the boy. It is remarkable that he managed to pass at all considering the passionate anxiety with which both his parents regarded the matter.

All this time, Emily Patmore was being nursed and looked after by her devoted sister, Georgiana, who had also married a Patmore, Coventry's brother George, in 1854. This brother was now dead. Little is known about him except that he died on the Isle of Johanna, Mozambique.

In the March of 1862 it became obvious that Emily Patmore could not live much longer. She herself wrote to a friend, 'I am very poorly to-day, weakening attacks incident to my complaint.'

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As the summer drew on she grew weaker. And some days after her daughter Emily's ninth birthday, June 2nd, she was very ill. Emily Honoria, when she was sixteen, noted down in a little memorandum :

One evening I had said good night, and came back to fetch a book. She was sitting in that folding cane chair which is in the entrance, with one hand on its arm, and her head leaned back, as if very weak. I sat up in bed to read my book, and came to the mother in it dying. It seemed to strike me very much : soon after, I heard all the bells in the house ringing, everyone running about, Papa calling my brother, and Mamma calling for 'the children'. I was very much frightened and stayed in bed.

The next day, the children were told that their mother was very ill, and they were sent away to stay with Mrs. Jackson.

The end had come at last. Both husband and wife had steeled themselves to this inevitable parting. The children had gone, and they were alone together in their little house in Hampstead where they had been so happy.

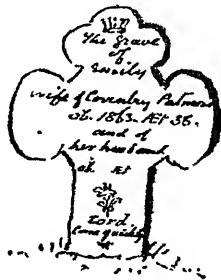
It was in July. The setting sun poured into Emily's bedroom. Her husband sat by her side, and they talked together for the last time. Her voice was very weak, hardly more than a whisper. Coventry Patmore himself has left such a vivid memory of her death in his exquisite ode *Departure* that I cannot do better than quote the lines :

Do you, that have nought other to lament,
Never, my Love, repent
Of how, that July afternoon,
You went,
With sudden, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
Upon your journey of so many days
Without a single kiss, or a good-bye?
I knew, indeed, that you were parting soon ;
And so we sat, within the low sun's rays,
You whispering to me, for your voice was weak,
Your harrowing praise.
Well, it was well,
To hear you such things speak,
And I could tell

Departure

What made your eyes a growing gloom of love,
As a warm South-wind sombres a March grove.
And it was like your great and gracious ways
To turn your talk on daily things, my Dear,
Lifting the luminous, pathetic lash
To let the laughter flash,
Whilst I drew near,
Because you spoke so low that I could scarcely hear.
But all at once to leave me at the last,
More at the wonder than the loss aghast,
With huddled, unintelligible phrase,
And frighten'd eye,
And go your journey of all days
With not one kiss, or a good-bye,
And the only loveless look the look with which you pass'd :
'Twas all unlike your great and gracious ways.

She later became insensible, and died a little before midnight, three days later.



PEN SKETCH BY COVENTRY PATMORE FOR EMILY PATMORE'S TOMB AT HENDON

After the funeral the children came home. Emily Honoria wrote :

Papa came for us in a cab. I asked how she was, and he said, 'Better than she has ever been.' I was so glad for a moment but he added, 'for she is in Heaven.' I was very—I don't know what, I felt very good but lonely, I leaned my head on Papa, but did not cry.

Then the young girl of sixteen goes on to say :

But I will tell you all I know of her death. She was insensible

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for three days, and died on Saturday at midnight, like our Lord being three days in the grave and rising at that time. The insensibility began at the time He was buried. Bertha, at Mrs. Jackson's, and only knowing she was ill, dreamt she was suddenly quite well, which must mean that she went straight to Heaven.

Just before her death, we used to feed the sparrows a great deal, and at last they used to eat off her pillows.

She was tall, not stout, but not sylph-like:

‘How changed, in shape no slender Grace
But Venus, milder than the dove.’

She had a perpetual smile, ‘like moonbeams on a wavering mere,’ and yet was always grave. Her eyes were ‘clear lakes of hazel colour’. . . . Her favourite flowers were Canterbury bells and colour Violet. . . .

She was only thirty-eight when she died. In her will, she left the following message for her husband:

I leave my wedding ring to your second wife with my love and blessing . . . also I leave you my grateful acknowledgement of your goodness and love to me, my last prayer that God may bless you and console you, my first and last love

If in a year or two you are able to marry again, do so happily, feeling that if my spirit can watch you it will love her who makes you happy, and envy her the reward of a part of your love, the best years of which I have had. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Tired Memory

HE was alone. The inevitable had happened, and to add sorrow to sorrow he was left with six motherless children.

As he writes in a later ode :

My heart was dead,
Dead of devotion and tired memory.

Vainly he attempted to recapture her lost presence. He re-read her letters, he studied her portrait, and kept beside him small intimate reminders of her—a pair of gloves, her favourite book (Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*) which he read, trying to find comfort. But she was dead. Like Eurydice, she had gone on a long journey far beyond recall.

He withdrew from the world of letters in which he had moved with his adored Emily, and courageously determined to devote himself to the upbringing of his children. He was not really suited by temperament for the task. He had no patience with all the little irritating and trifling failings of children, but he did all he could to adapt himself to the new circumstances.

In a remarkable letter to William Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, who had suffered a like bereavement, he wrote on July 16th, just after his own wife's death :

Your letter to my sister-in-law (my wife's sister and brother's wife) was a real happiness to me. The number of my children is the same as yours, and it is much to find that you are able to speak from a matured experience of the result of a like loss so consolingly. I can already perceive and fully feel the love of God in this inexpressible loss. It was the thing my life required. It will be easy to draw near to Christ now. She is with Him, and it will be not a double but a four-fold power of tenderness and watchfulness, which will henceforward be in me, to supply their mother's

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loss. I thank God too that so much time was given to me to foresee and prepare for the event, which my brain could not have borne had it not been for the long preparation of fear. . . .

Coventry Patmore has been accused of being a tyrant in the home. It is true that he was often intolerant and impatient and even cruel. But it must be remembered that the death of Emily had left him in an agony of despair. Frederick Page observes that 'from the 5th of July (the date of Emily's death) Patmore's life was posthumous and ante-natal. At intervals he reports himself as "cheerfully waiting to die", and at last, "somewhat impatiently waiting to die".' A man of extreme sensitiveness—*The Angel in the House* is one of the most sensuous poems in the English language—his nerves were now on edge and he was easily moved to sudden anger. These moods made him unfit to look after children, but in his loneliness he clung to them as they were all that were left to him. At the same time, he had a great capacity for tenderness and sympathy. Well aware of the conflict in his own nature, his moments of anger would be followed by remorse. Witness his pathetic poem *The Toys* which he later told Buxton Forman was written about his eldest son, Milnes:

My little Son, who look'd from thoughtful eyes
And moved and spoke in quiet grown-up wise,
Having my law the seventh time disobey'd,
I struck him, and dismiss'd
With hard words and unkiss'd,
His Mother, who was patient, being dead.
Then, fearing lest his grief should hinder sleep,
I visited his bed,
But found him slumbering deep,
With darken'd eyelids, and their lashes yet
From his late sobbing wet,
And I, with moan,
Kissing away his tears, left others of my own:
For, on a table drawn beside his head,
He had put, within his reach,
A box of counters and a red-veined stone,
A piece of glass abraded by the beach
And six or seven shells,
A bottle with bluebells

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And two French copper coins, ranged there with careful art,
To comfort his sad heart.
So when that night I pray'd
To God, I wept, and said :
Ah, when at last we lie with trancéd breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joýs,
How weakly understood,
Thy great commanded good,
Then, fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded from the clay,
Thou'l leave Thy wrath, and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.'

He himself admitted that he did not understand boys, and both his sons, Milnes and Tennyson, suffered from this lack of comprehension. Like many Victorians, he always had a marked preference for girls. But with the innate sense of duty and the faith of his generation, he did attempt to share some kind of life with his children and he loved them deeply after his own fashion. It is possible—although he was unaware of the fact—that his moments of anger with his children were caused by an unconscious feeling that they were the cause of his adored Emily's death—it is a known medical fact that too much child-bearing is dangerous for consumptives.

By this time, 1862, his eldest son, Milnes, was a naval cadet on the *Britannia*, thanks to the active influence of his god-father, Monckton Milnes. His second son, Tennyson, was at Christ's Hospital, and Emily, Bertha, Gertrude and Henry, their ages ranging from nine years down to two, were boarded with different friends.

In the intervals of his work at the British Museum, the harassed father wrote regular letters to all his family. Rather than neglect them, he put aside his literary work.

His eldest daughter Emily became his confidante. She it was who 'mothered' the rest of the family now that their mother was dead.

Soon after his bereavement he wrote to Emily, whilst he was staying with a friend, probably Lady Monteagle :

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I am staying with a very kind and beautiful lady who used to be one of the Queen's Maids of Honour—who are always chosen from among the finest and most beautiful and noble ladies in England. Your Mama was just like one of these great and gentle ladies, and I hope you will be like one of them some day. This lady often talks to me about you, and particularly advised me to get you to learn to *sew* and *hem*—as 'useful learning' ought always to come before learning things that only give pleasure, like music. . . . Kiss Bertha, Gertrude and Henry for me.

Just before his wife's death, he had written to his son, Tennyson, the following letter, which is a terrifying illustration of how little the mid-Victorians understood children:

My dear Tennyson,

I write to remind you of your promise to work hard and regain your place at the upper part of your class. You must know that you have been disappointing us a great deal lately, and that it has not been without many a heartache that I and your Mama have seen your chance of being a Grecian growing less and less. We feel sure that, if you chose, you might get one of the cleverest boys at the head of your class to tell you what your Ovid means, when you cannot find out.

Remember, my dear little boy, that you are not likely to have your poor Mama long. Although she does not look very ill, she is really much worse than she was a year ago, and she is *sure* not to live very long. So you should make the best of the time you have left to please her. It will make you very unhappy, when she is gone, to think that you might have made her happier, and did not do so.

But, although your learning well is very important, there are other things much more important. To be always strictly honest, always to tell the simple truth, and to be *pure*, (you know what I mean) are the *most* important things. When the other boys say and do dirty things (as many boys at all great schools will) remember those words of Jesus Christ, 'The pure in heart shall see God'—that is to say they will go to heaven. If you are not pure, you will not only not see God, but you will not see your dear Mama any more when she is once gone.

Cannot you get Mr. Simon's nephew (who is now Deputy Grecian) to help you with your Ovid? You may ask him to come and spend the afternoon with us, if you like, your next

Tired Memory

holiday: and you can dine in Percy Street, and go afterwards to Elm Cottage, and take Wolf out for a walk.

Your affectionate Father,

C. Patmore.

They were very sad, these years following Emily Patmore's death. Sometimes he found life almost intolerable in its loneliness. He was even separated by necessity and lack of money from his children. After working all day at the British Museum, he would return to his lodgings at 14 Percy Street, and brood over the happy past. As he wrote to his daughter Emily:

My evenings are very dull. I generally take a long walk, after Museum time, in the dark, to some place in the country where I have been with Mama. But that does not take up the whole evening, and I often want somebody to talk to, for part of the time. You must haste and grow up, and then we will patch up another 'home'.

And then he yearned to see his little daughter:

I am beginning to want very much to see you again. I shall think it a great treat to kiss your dear little face. . . .

Christmas time arrived—a melancholy reminder of happier days when they all enjoyed themselves in the little Hampstead house hung with holly, and Emily Patmore presided over all the festivities, a charming figure in her new crinoline. However, Coventry was determined to make the occasion as happy and festive as possible. Emily and her father enjoyed a pleasant conspiracy about presents for the other children. She sent him a medallion of herself by her friend, Julia Marshall, and the delighted father wrote:

Christmas Eve.

My dear little girl,

I have just time before post to say that your box of beautiful presents is come safely, and to ask you to tell Julia that the medallion is a great treasure. I think it an admirable likeness, and it would have been impossible to desire a more acceptable Christmas gift.

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The children are not coming to town. I and Tenny are going to spend the afternoon with them at Finchley, and afterwards to dine at Mr. Worsley's at Hendon. . . . You can fancy Bertha's face when the things are given to her. She will look as if she were quietly melting into honey with delight.

Tenny is quite overpowered with his Shakespeare: he never had anything so fine before. He grins first at it and then at me, and then again at the book. I hope he will have recovered himself before post-time enough to write you a line. . . .

Two days later he wrote again to Emily:

Xmas Day went off excellently yesterday, notwithstanding your forebodings that Bertha would be disappointed. You may be sure that I am as tender about Bertha's feelings as you are.

The presents were received with rapture. Bertha put on her beautiful dress, before we had the Xmas Tree, and Henry embraced his book for two whole hours in an ecstasy.

I have posted your letter to Milnes. Poor fellow, I fear he has had a sad Xmas, among his swearing, grog-drinking ship-mates. Next Xmas, however, he will probably spend with us, and we will make it *so* happy for him, will we not?

Meantime, some of his more intimate friends tried to comfort him in his loneliness. In October, 1862, Aubrey de Vere, always a devoted admirer and friend, wrote from Coniston:

Your note has a very sad sound, but I ought to be all the more obliged to you for having, notwithstanding, remembered your promise, for it is when we are most out of spirits that we find it most troublesome to write in general. I am not at all surprised at your return to your home having a very depressing effect upon you. It is most sadly natural that this should be the case; and, alas, the more so when a house already left empty is made more empty by your children being away from it, though not fortunately far away. I believe that, when we begin to lift up our heads again after any great bereavement, the progress we make, even under the most favourable circumstances, is far from being an even or equal progress. . . .

What I have tried to write will at least show you how strongly I sympathise with you, and how strong are my hopes that in proportion to present suffering will be your future consolation.



EMILY HONORIA PATMORE, Coventry Patmore's
favourite Daughter. *From a medallion by Julia Marshall, 1863*

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Then follows a postscript that evidently refers to the Tennysons, with whom de Vere was staying:

We talk much of you here; and the other day, when we effected the ascent of the 'Old Man', everyone of the party expressed more than once the feeling of regret, which we all shared, at your absence. It was a glorious day, the mountain peaks rising like islands above a vast ocean of shining white mist.

And Woolner, another devoted friend, tried to shake him out of his lethargic despair, and made him answer an attack on *The Children's Garland*, the book which Emily and Coventry Patmore had compiled together:

Although a good thing will inevitably make its own way, yet a good husbandman takes care to stir the soil, that his young crop may flourish more readily and abundantly; and the reason why great men usually succeed during their lives is because they omit no possible contingency of ensuring their triumph. . . .

I am anxious this poem* of yours should be handsomely received by the public, for, now that you have lost the highest joy of life, I want to see your name grow great and splendid that you may get some kind of interest in the growth among your countrymen of that which was consecrated to her who was your happiness.

But Emily Patmore was not so easily forgotten and he was now beset by domestic worries. He was particularly disturbed about the conduct of his eldest child Milnes, who was now a good-looking, high-spirited boy of fourteen. On January 19th, 1863, he wrote to Monckton Milnes, who took a special interest in the boy:

I and my children are in good health. The little ones are in charge of some ladies at Finchley, and I see them almost daily, either visiting them or having one or more to stay with me at Hampstead, where I am still living. The Cadet has been home the last five weeks, and is greatly improved in habits of insubordination, and everything else, except his care of his outfit, with which he continues to make sad havoc—wearing out more clothes in three months than I get through in two years. The Xmas

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report from the Captain of the 'Britannia' was very gratifying as to his studies, and has removed my fear as to his passing the Midsummer examination—unless he gets 'Plucked' for want of care of his things—which they make a point of, I believe.

The parent's hopes were short-lived. On March 6th, 1863, he wrote in reply to a letter from Monckton Milnes :

Your inclosure is a terrible shock to me for I had trusted that my boy had left off his troublesome ways. The Captain's report, for the half-year ending Xmas was—

'Study'—Satisfactory
'Seamanship'—Satisfactory
'Conduct'—Indifferent

and this was an immense advance upon the state of things indicated by the boy's last report from the 'Naval School', also his conduct, with me, in the holidays, was all that I could reasonably desire. He must therefore have gone wild again since he last joined his ship.

I enclose a copy of the letter I have written to him. Facts and *proofs* (such as sending him down his uniform) are the things to prevail with him, if anything can.

I assure you that no small part of my immediate trouble arises from the consideration of your having been so abundantly kind to him, and all, perhaps, in vain, as regards *him*.

I think my letter is likely to have more influence than my going down to him would have. He may forget my words, but he will read the letter over and over again.

From Coventry Patmore to his son (the italics are Patmore's).

British Museum, March 6th, 1863.

My dear Boy,

I am overwhelmed with sorrow and surprise at receiving a letter from Mr. Milnes, inclosing another letter from Admiral Eden, who tells Mr. Milnes that '*if the boy does not improve he had better be taken away*', and saying that your character is unsatisfactory '*in study, in seamanship, and especially in conduct*'.

I tell you plainly that, under the circumstances, if I do have to take you away, I shall place you '*before the mast*' in a merchant ship; for I see that, after all, your purposes and promises of

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amendment cannot be trusted, and that nothing but the discipline you will get as a common sea-boy will probably bring you to your senses.

I shall send you your new uniform down next week, as you may as well have the use of it during the short time you are likely to be allowed the unmerited honour of remaining in Her Majesty's Navy.

I advise you to postpone your Confirmation until some future time. You cannot be in a proper state to take your Christian vows upon yourself, when you have so far forgotten the vows, made beside your Mother's coffin, as to bring down on you the disgrace of this letter from Admiral Eden, who writes: 'I should advise his friends writing to him, and urging on him the necessity of mending his ways, *so that, next month, the report may be such as to obviate the necessity of my bringing his case before the board.*'

Your affectionate father,

Coventry Patmore.

Young Milnes may have read and re-read his father's terrible letter, but he remained in rebellion against all authority. In May, the harassed and humiliated parent paid a visit to his son's ship and then wrote again to Monckton Milnes:

May 21st.

My dear Mr. Milnes,

I have been to the 'Britannia' and have had the fullest explanation and discussion of the matter with the Captain, the Commander and the Instructor in Chief, who all treated the case with great consideration and kindness, and I must say, I do not see that, under the system of purely 'moral suasion'—which is the only one permitted—any conclusion is possible but that which Captain Powell has arrived at. The boy does not feel the force of being 'reported'; and seems to think the penal night-watches rather 'jolly' than otherwise; and consequently treats all authorities like so many nurse-maids. He is as clever a boy as any on board, and surprises his teachers by getting through his examinations without any visible work, and is 'without particle of vice' in him. But his 'skylarking' impulses are too strong for Bible-Classes and threats of remote admiralty thunders; and so his prospects are spoiled and his family humiliated, *because he is not bad enough to be birched.* That is the sum and substance of the information I have gathered. Mr. Inskip—the Head Instructor—told me distinctly that no harm would

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have come had the authorities possessed a wider discretion in the use of corporal punishment and brief imprisonment. But he is evidently unmanageable otherwise, and I rather wondered—when Captain Powell showed me the long list of reported cases of insubordination in trifles—that the end has not come before.

I pleaded against the justice with as much countenance as I could, but evidently without a chance of success.

I will call in Brook Street to-morrow morning, and will tell you more fully what passed.

Believe me,

My dear Mr. Milnes,

Ever truly yours,

Coventry Patmore.

We do not know Monckton Milnes' reaction to this letter, but he was obviously fond of his god-son, for he continued to help him and take an interest in his welfare all through his life. Patmore made a last effort to save his son from disgrace by seeing Admiral Eden, the man whom Monckton Milnes had persuaded to give the boy the cadet-ship, but this visit was unavailing. He reported to Milnes:

British Museum, May 23.

I have seen Admiral Eden, but without being able to persuade him that there was anything in my boy's case to justify a departure from the fixed rules for the discipline of the Cadets.

A thousand thanks for all your kind thought and trouble about him. I do not look upon anything which has been done for him as ultimately lost. He has had a gentleman's education, and it will work in his conscience and give him no peace until he submits himself to the laws of gentleness. For my own disappointment in the matter, it and all other possible calamities have been made light by that which I went through a year ago.

The cadet was removed from the *Britannia* and sent before the mast on a merchant ship. He later led a very adventurous life and became a fine sailor and sea-captain. But he never forgave his father. A rift remained between Coventry Patmore and his

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eldest son. Frustrated in his domestic life, the poet withdrew into his inner self. He was obsessed by memories of Emily. If only she had lived! She would have known how to deal with the unruly Milnes. He sought consolation in memory and noted in his private memoranda:

Remember, above all, the 5,410 days she was my wife, and on each one of which, though nothing happened to be remembered, she did her duty to me, her children, her neighbours, and to God, with a lovely, unnoticeable evenness and completeness.

The last volume of *The Angel in the House* called *The Victories of Love* was published during this year by Macmillan. Patmore had added a postscript which speaks for itself:

The Plan of the Poem, or series of Poems, of which this volume is the conclusion, involved, as it was schemed more than fourteen years ago, a final section on the subject of the hope which remains for individual love in death. It is well, perhaps, for the interest of poetry in this great and hitherto unapproached theme, that my weak voice has been hushed. I no longer have, at every step, the needful encouragement of an approval which was all that my heart valued of fame.

He took little interest in the public's reception of this volume, but its form is interesting as it forecasts the style of his later poetry. The *Wedding Sermon* in particular indicates a new trend of thought which will eventually culminate in *The Unknown Eros* odes. A note, dated at this time, from his private memoranda gives the key to the transition taking place in his poetical ideas:

The relation of the soul to Christ as *his betrothed wife* is the key to the feeling with which prayer and love and honour should be offered to Him. In this relation is a mine of undiscovered joy and power. *She* showed me what that relationship involves of heavenly submission and spotless, passionate loyalty.

In the summer of 1863, nostalgic memories drove him back to the scene of their honeymoon. He was beginning to be wrapt in a mystical appreciation of his marriage. Death had

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transfigured his terrestrial marriage into a celestial one. In raptures he dreamed of his beloved, and

I, who had dream'd of thee as sad and sick and dying,
And only so, nightly for all one year,
Did thee, my own most Dear,
Possess,
In gay, celestial beauty nothing coy,
And felt the soft caress
With heretofore unknown reality of joy.

He went to Hastings and stayed in the rooms to which he had first brought his young bride in 1847. He wrote to his daughter:

I am staying at the very same hotel and in the very same rooms where I and your dear Mother were, the first days we were married. You may fancy that it makes me feel very happy and very sad.

And to his colleague at the British Museum, Richard Garnett, he wrote:

I suppose your honeymoon has commenced. At least it is about to commence. . . . I too am enjoying a honeymoon of memory and hope which it is my prayer that sixteen years' probation may entitle you also to enjoy—without the drawback I suffer I am in the same house and the same rooms to which I brought my bride in 1847, and for your comfort as a true-hearted young bridegroom I can without a shadow of exaggeration say that my first nuptial joy was a poor thing compared with the infinite satisfaction I can now feel in the assurance which time has brought, that my relation to Her is as eternal as it is happy.

Back again in London, he was plunged in domesticities, and he related in a letter to Emily:

I saw the little ones yesterday, and gave Henry your letter. He seemed greatly delighted and ran about with it in his hand without appearing to care to know what was in it. They are all well and happy. Tennyson* spent the afternoon and evening with me on Tuesday. He works very hard, and does a great deal of fighting besides. The two black eyes he came home with last time are nearly well however. . . .

*Tennyson Patmore, his second son.

Tired Memory

Write to Tennyson soon. Not a short letter; but one three or four pages long, for there is nothing he likes more than having letters; and like all people who care for their friends, when he gets letters from them, he looks first to see how long they are, and cares more for the love shown in taking the trouble to write fully, than all else that the letter may contain.

If you find that you want anything, such as more handkerchiefs, socks or clothes, tell me, and I will send them.

Referring to his new lodgings, he wrote:

You will be glad to hear that I am very comfortable in my new place. . . . I have had to call the policemen many times to the organ boys who prevent me from reading and writing and thinking. One was very rude, and would not go away, and I could not find a policeman: so I had to go out to him and pour some water over him, and that made him go away. The street will soon be quite quiet. . . .

Another time, father and daughter had an argument about her reading *Punch*:

Mrs Marshall, you tell me, doubts whether *Punch* is good reading for you. I am quite of Mrs. Marshall's opinion, and I am sure that your Mama would have been so too. I cannot tell how you can be 'very, very, very sure that Mama used to let you' when, to the best of my recollection, I would never have a copy of *Punch* in our house. . . .

The *Punch* controversy continued in another letter:

I am delighted to hear that Mrs. Marshall agrees with me in detesting *Punch*. I daresay that an odd number of *Fun* with a parody upon the 'Angel' in it, did once get into our house, and that it was given to you and Bertha to cut up—as a proper punishment for having 'cut up' me.

During the beginning of 1864, Patmore felt he needed a holiday. His health, never very robust, showed the strain and worry of the last two years. Aubrey de Vere, who seems to have taken a delicate and solicitous interest in him during these difficult years, urged him to go with him to Rome.

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February of this year, acknowledging some snowdrops, which were always favourite flowers of his, that Emily had sent him, he said in a charming letter:

I have treated your snowdrops with the greatest care, and I hope they will recover from the effects of the fearful stamping which they received in the post. Their lower limbs are dreadfully bruised, and the paper is covered with their green blood; they are at present in a fainting condition, and I do not know whether they are not too far gone even for the powers of salvolatile. . . . I always wonder how the snowdrops know what time it is to get up; for they do not mind the frost. All they insist upon is that it shall be the end of January or the beginning of February. They are by much the most cunning little flowers I know.

He then went on to mention the Italian project:

I believe that I am *certainly* going to Italy about the middle of the month. Mr. Panizzi tells me that there is no doubt that leave will be given to me by the Trustees of the Museum. I should so much like to have taken my little pet, but it would cost too much money. . . .

Leave of absence was granted, and soon Patmore was ready to go. He was not very enthusiastic about the long journey. He wrote to Emily:

I expect to be very dull and miserable for the two or three weeks until I get to Rome, but when I am there I shall be all right, for nobody can be dull where Mr. de Vere is. Don't you remember how he looked like sunshine whenever he came to see us at Hampstead or Highgate Rise?

The end of February found Coventry Patmore setting out from London Bridge on his eventful journey—a journey that was to change the whole course of his life.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Journey to Rome

HE had not visited Paris since he went to school at St. Germain at the age of sixteen; and as he himself says, 'The city was wholly new to me . . . I had forgotten everything, except the Place Vendôme where I used to go to spend my Sundays at Mrs. Gore's.'

He spent two days roaming about the city. It was a bitterly cold February, and the fountains were coated with ice, and a pain in his chest forced him to journey on south. However, he managed to see a good deal during his stay. He was pleasantly surprised by the beauty of Nôtre Dame. He wrote to his friend, Mrs. Jackson: * 'I have never seen anything in pointed architecture so completely beautiful as Nôtre Dame seen from the Quay on the south-east.'

He spent five hours at the Louvre, and was rather humiliated to find that

I could get little or no pleasure from many paintings which are considered to be among the finest in the world. Some of the greatest Raphaels and Titians scarcely touched me: the mighty scenes of Rubens disgusted me, as the works of no artist of less wonderful power could have done: the grinning woman, in every canvas of Leonardo, still haunts my mind's eye like a disagreeable dream.

On the other hand, he found much to admire in the works of certain French painters:

There is a *Deluge* by Nicolas Poussin which is, to my feeling, the most thoughtful and imaginative picture I have seen.

*Mrs. Jackson was an old family friend. She had been a friend of Emily Patmore, and helped the young widower in the care of his children. Her eldest daughter married Henry Halford Vaughan, and another married Leslie Stephen.

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Another picture that pleased him was Gérard's '*Cupid and Psyche*' :

Certainly love has never been expressed with more force, delicacy, and spiritual science than in the *Cupid and Psyche* of Gerard. As I mean to have a vignette of this picture for the title-page of the next edition of *The Angel in the House*, I will say no more about it.

After these, I think I was most impressed by the three vast Giulio Romanos and one or two queer allegories by Mantegna. With the famous *Venus of Milo* I was not so much pleased as I hoped to be. We have a comparatively unknown *Venus* very much like it, but I think better, in the British Museum; and all the sculptures in the Louvre put together are not worth our *Theseus* or *The Fates*. I intend to spend several mornings in the Louvre on my way home.

He was charmed with the change of scene. He liked the French :

I had so forgotten as to be agreeably surprised at the ways of the French folk—or at least at some of them. It is pleasant to find the justice of such a remark as *Il fait froid* recognised with an emphasis and gravity not awarded in my own country, to what I consider my most original observations; and the countenance which everyone kept while I talked French filled me with gratitude and admiration. . . .

Apart from the Louvre, he wisely attempted to see little else :

I spent the remainder of my two days in Paris, much as I should have spent two idle days in London. This is the only way (for me, at least) to see a place. Express sight-seeing is quite fatal to the power of seeing anything aright. If you are to be but a few days at a place, behave just as if you were to be there two years, and do not go to the sights, but let the sights, or as many of them as will, come to you. That is my rule. It has these advantages, you see things with a quiet mind, and in their true proportions as related to your home 'surroundings' with which all your comparisons and estimates have to be made; and you leave the place still clad, to your memory, with the great charm of the indefinite, and with much left to be seen in your next visit, which may never come.

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He journeyed on to Nice, and was entranced with the sudden brilliant change in climate:

If my surprise [he writes] was great at rushing into summer at Marseilles, you may think what it was on entering the tropics at Nice. Such a climate, such scenery, and such vegetation! Rocks of white marble with huge aloes and cactuses growing out of the crevices, groves of lemon and orange in full blossom and full bearing; grey forests of olive, with the ground beneath them full of geraniums, roses, and anemones in flower; feathery palm trees, and gigantic reeds and ferns swaying in the soft air . . .

For the first time in my life I acknowledge advantage over coach travelling. No such effect could have been possible without our new power of traversing astronomical distances (about 700 miles or about one-third of the moon's face) in twenty-four hours.

Travelling through Europe in 1864 must have had a gracious charm that has now vanished. No wonder the tall gaunt English poet was enchanted with Nice. After his solitary life in London lodgings during the last two years it was intoxicating to walk through the gaily-thronged Place Masséna with its pink stucco buildings and palm trees waving against a clear blue sky. It was a delight to wander along the Promenade des Anglais and watch the delicate crinolined figures with their bright parasols, dally along the promenade with their escorts. It appears that food was his only anxiety. He wrote to his friend, Mrs. Jackson:

Here, as in Paris, I find great difficulty in getting anything to eat, except at the Table d'Hôte, which is long after my usual feeding time. At the hour I require a pound of steak and a pint of ale, I go into the most likely-looking shop, and, after walking three times round a table on which are thirty or forty different plates, I select what looks the most substantial, and bite a brown bladder of air; and end by making my luncheon off three ounces of perfumed sugar and one of chocolate. Unless they manage these things better in Rome, I shall die, or come back before my time.

He survived, however, and took long walks along the coast.

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Then he went on to Genoa by diligence. It was a long fatiguing journey :

For twenty-one hours the diligence made no stoppage whatever except to change horses, and this was never done at an inn ; so nothing passed by lips during that time but one glass of eau sucrée, which I obtained at the stopping-place by representing through the driver that I was dying of thirst ; for I was past eating. . . .

Then he added wistfully : 'Sir Vere de Vere had warned me that land-travelling to Rome was not to be lightly undertaken, but I was not prepared for anything like this.'

However, the journey had its compensations, even though he caught cold due to the rain pouring through the roof of the coupé. He left Nice at eight o'clock in the morning :

The rain had been pouring down all night and was still doing so, and every hill was dense with cloud. So I gave up all thought of seeing anything of what it seems to be agreed is the most delightful road in Italy (the Corniche road) . . . but just as we got to the greatest height of the Pass, more than 2,000 feet above the sea, into which I could have rolled a stone, the rain left off, the clouds were broken up and partly dispersed by a splendid sun, and there appeared below me a series of scenes which with all my uncommon sloth and indifference in the matter of sight-seeing I could not but own to be by themselves well worth a thousand-mile journey. For below, wherever there happened to rise a particularly insurmountable crag, there a little, lovely, faint peach-coloured town crowded itself together, like a flock of sheep, when the dog barks round ; and amidst it rose a light campanile, and the enormous ruin of some historic fortress, round which the town had originally gathered itself ; the background, the brilliant Mediterranean, on which long lines of shining mist were sleeping ; the bounds, the sides of mountains so beautifully chasmed, chiselled, and dotted lower down with olives and oranges, that every square yard of surface had its interest ; and the whole bathed in a spacious gulf of delicate air, burthened at intervals with drifting coils of golden and swiftly dissolving clouds . . .

Then he approached Genoa :

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The place . . . is magnificent beyond anything I had expected . . . Well, now I am come to Genoa, an English Milord in the coupé all by myself, and my six horses jingling their hundred little bells, and trotting before me as freely and as loosely-harnessed as a company of Zouaves; but I am inwardly feeling 'what wretches feel', and have no heart to appreciate the courtesy of the officer of the octroi, who looks into other people's things, but takes the word of a Milord that there is nothing taxable in his baggage . . .

However, despite his cold, he went sight-seeing, and made the following comment:

I had no notion before of the power of Cinque Cento architecture on its own soil; nor of the beauty of the effects got by the use of precious materials, as in the Church of the Annunciation which looks as if it had cost the wealth of a kingdom. I was wrong in making up my mind on this and other architectural points on theory and without seeing the buildings. The Lombard 'Duomo', for another instance, has more than reconciled me to the Italian mode of building in alternate courses of differently coloured marbles.

There is, in all the architecture of Genoa, a look of having come 'out of the abundance of the heart', which at first at least indisposes me to judge it by any formal principles; and upon nearly all the buildings the hand of decay is gently but manifestly present and forbids one to say anything of the dead, unless it be good . . .

And so he travelled on through Pisa:

where I spent a morning, I need not wait to hear from you that we agree in thinking the Campo Santo simply the loveliest spot on earth. The frescoes and the surrounding arcades, with their canopy of open cloudless sky, seemed a fit environment for the clay that came from Calvary.

He regretted that he had had to wait until he was forty to visit Italy, and remarked sadly: 'But at forty little is added to one's life'.

Then on through Spezia, Lerici and Serchio until he reached Leghorn, where he embarked to go by sea to Rome.

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Some hidden impulse had driven him to Rome, and now that he was there he wondered why he had come. His health had not been improved by the journey, and after the first days of his arrival in Rome he wrote to Mrs. Jackson: 'The climate itself seems to fatigue me, and the purpose of my journey is not likely to be answered.'

He was staying in a very pleasant part of the city near the Pantheon. It was probably Aubrey de Vere who persuaded him to stay at the Hotel Minerva. It was one of the fashionable hotels in those days. To-day it still stands, a large old-fashioned pink building with blue windows and white shutters, in the small Piazza Minerva, but its glory has somewhat faded and it now calls itself the Hotel Minerva-Cavour-Francia.

He was disappointed by his first impressions of Rome. He wrote to his daughter, Emily:

I am living very comfortably in a very great hotel where about a hundred and fifty ladies and gentlemen sit down to one table to dinner every day. Rome is the least interesting town I have yet seen. To-day I saw the Pope and all the Cardinals in Saint Peter's quite well. He is a very nice, kind-looking old gentleman, and so are most of the Cardinals. I do not know exactly when I shall come home. It is not likely to be more than four months, and may be only three. I must come back, you know, when all my money is spent, and living is extremely dear here . . .

Perhaps he had expected too much of Rome. Genoa and Pisa had surpassed his wildest expectations, and the first impression of Rome, about which clung a legendary glamour, had been decidedly disappointing. However, his friend and companion, Aubrey de Vere, was determined that he should enjoy his visit, and his disappointment soon turned to pleasure. Meanwhile, a few days after his arrival he could write:

After breakfast on Friday [the letter is dated March 8th] I went out not knowing where I was going, and almost the first building I passed was a circular edifice of brick, with a mean façade, which I went by without giving it more than a glance. It struck me, however, when I had passed it, that it might be the Pantheon, for it certainly was, as Gertrude would say 'a little big'. I was right in my guess; I went some way further, and was

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for several minutes approaching a good-sized church, without anything in its appearance to attract attention ; but at last came to a colonnade with two fountains and an obelisk, and I asked Mr. Monsell, who went with me—as he told Mr. de Vere, to witness my enthusiasm—if that was St. Peter's? Have you ever stepped down a step without being prepared for it? Probably you have. But have you ever stepped down four or five steps at once in such a way? If not you cannot understand quite the unexpectedness of the drop from my very moderate expectations to the reality. It is commonly said that St. Peter's does not look as large as St. Paul's. I assure you that it does not look one quarter as large as St. Paul's ; and that this is owing, not as the be-praisers of Rome say, to its superior beauty of proportion, but to its vast architectural inferiority . . . Everybody tells me that Rome and everything in it 'grows upon you' so much . . .

Sure enough, Rome did grow upon him. A few weeks later he is writing a very different kind of letter home.

Aubrey de Vere, besides being a prominent Roman Catholic, knew everyone of importance in Rome, and his friend, Mr. Monsell, later Lord Emly, also belonged to the aristocratic colony of English Roman Catholics ; and owing to their joint introduction Coventry Patmore soon found himself launched on a round of social gaiety.

He wrote to Mrs. Jackson :

Can you believe that I, who allow myself only two parties a year in England, have been attending an average of nearly two a night in Rome? As it is Lent, the Roman Principessas and Marchesas have not much gaiety at their own houses, but they give quiet 'receptions' and go to the parties of the English ; and the other night I had a deliberate view of every lady in Rome at the reception at the French Embassy . . .

Wandering about the brilliantly-lit salons of the Farnese Palace, and quietly watching the guests at the reception, his imagination was captured by the splendour and colour of Roman life. Shrewdly he remarked that :

in Roman society the women are in the enjoyment of an advantage which might well be envied by the women of other countries ; I mean the setting-off of their gay dresses and white shoul-

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ders by the contrasting crowd of Cardinals, Monsignors, and smaller ecclesiastics, who form so large a portion of every Roman party . . .

His intellect was seduced by the culture and fine erudition of the great Catholic dignitaries :

Priests are by very much the pleasantest, best-informed and most conversable people in Rome . . . The manners of one or two of the Cardinals, with whom I have had the pleasure of talking, are the most perfect I have met with. I have seen equal—never superior—refinement in other men, but seldom in combination with it so kindly a simplicity. Certainly Roman Catholicism has some claims (I do not know how much the claims may be worth) to be called, as it has been, ‘the religion of gentlemen’.

The hidden purpose of his journey to Rome was beginning to be made clear. Here at last, in this magnificent city where the churches were like palaces and Cardinals were Princes of the Church, where religion was a thing of beauty, he was about to discover the solution of his religious doubts.

Always deeply religious, he had been revolted by the grim austerities of Presbyterianism. His passionately sensuous nature, the poet in him, demanded something more. He craved beauty in religion, and Rome gave him this in the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel, with its subtle mingling of classical art and the mysticism of Christianity. Despite his Protestant upbringing, he was captivated by the Southern interpretation of the Madonna, in whose worship the cult of beauty merges with that of the Virgin Mary—that exquisite Virgin, whom he was to describe in a later poem as ‘the Lady whose smile inflames the spheres’.

Aubrey de Vere, who for some time had secretly hoped to convert Coventry Patmore, had done his work well. His friend felt happier than he had been for years in this circle of English Roman Catholics.

In a letter to Mrs. Jackson, Patmore confided his new-found happiness :

I have made several acquaintances among the English Catho-

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lies here from whom it will be a real regret to part. Lord and Lady Feilding would delight you, I am sure ; they are both very young and very handsome, and seem to be as simple and good as they are circumstantially happy. In conversing with her especially, I feel quite disgusted at being a 'heretic'. Of all the characteristics of what I will call Roman Catholic manners the most attractive to me is the essentially un-English absence of reserve in speaking of subjects of the dearest and highest interest, combined with the equally un-English absence of cant . . .

And so the weeks went by. By April, he was feeling much improved in health, and writing to Richard Garnett, he said :

I am getting to like Rome and the Romans more and more, though my first impression of the place, from the architectural point of view, is not improved. I have made several very agreeable acquaintances, and shall feel more regret in leaving the place than I have ever before felt on leaving any place that was not home. My cough is nearly gone, and my health generally better . . .

I went to the Protestant Burial Ground to see if I could find some violets for you on the graves of Shelley and Keats. I have got one from Shelley's and three from Keats'. It was a little too late. A week before, I was told, the two graves were a mass of violets . . .

He was so much at home in Rome that when walking in the Pincian Gardens he had to lift his hat to every third carriage driving by, and he told Mrs. Jackson :

My kind friends here have acted with such energy upon a word I let drop the first day I came, to the effect that I felt more interest in persons than in things, that I actually at the present moment know more people in Rome than I do in England.

However, despite his enthusiasm for Rome, he still remained the insular British patriot, and when describing his impressions of Roman Society he praised the lovely Marchesa Pallavicini :

She has the reputation of being the most beautiful, at

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present, woman in Rome. She is certainly very beautiful—but her beauty is quite English—fair and small in feature, and singularly like Mrs. Vaughan in general expression.

Commenting on the various parties he attended, he said :

Beauty of countenance is rare, except in the English, and among them there are not nearly so many beauties as there ought to be considering their number and class. . . .

It is curious, however, that a Roman woman, when she does happen to be beautiful, is singularly so. The absence of mental culture, which gives forty-nine Roman women out of fifty a look of vulgarity, causes in the fiftieth the most charming look of child-like innocence. I never saw this combination of dignity of figure and feature with baby-sweetness in any women—except one—out of Rome. The insecurity of money in most other forms has caused the Roman nobles to invest enormous sums in diamonds for their wives. These magnificent decorations do not become countenances like cookmaids, but they are very piquant additions to the exceptional beauties, who, for all their stately necks, great dark eyes, and grand Roman noses, smile as if they thought nothing so nice as a lump of sugar or a kiss, and would willingly give their hundred thousand pounds necklace or diadem for a hoop or a skipping- rope . . .

But while he allowed Aubrey de Vere and Mr. Monsell to guide him through the social gaieties of Roman life, he was tormented by an inner conflict. The abominable allurements of Roman Catholicism had raised their head again, and this time he was determined to examine the whole problem seriously.

He records in his religious autobiography written years later :

And now that, for the first time, I set myself to get the question settled, I for the first time found in myself a strength of opposition which I had not felt before. In fact, I was now in the battle between truth and error, instead of being merely, as it were, a spectator of it. I placed myself under the regular instruction of an eminent Jesuit, Father Cardella, and another Catholic of great piety and learning—a layman—whose acquaintance I had made in Rome. All my intellectual objections, as before, were confuted, and my Will was more and more powerfully attracted, but, together with the attraction, grew

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the alternating reluctance and repulsion. At one part of the same day I saw with almost perfect clearness that I ought to become a Catholic, and a few hours later this clearness would vanish and a sense of repugnance, so strong that it for the time suspended all other argument, would take its place.

These alternating moods harried him for many weeks. He hesitated to make such a radical change in his life. For it must be remembered that, in 1864, the majority of English people still regarded Catholicism as a menacing force waiting in the dark to entrap and seduce the weak and unsuspecting.

Gradually the struggle grew weaker:

Every day was partly spent in the friendly company of such persons as the Cardinal Reisach, Monsignor, afterwards Cardinal Howard, Father Cardella, Mr. and Mrs. de la Barre Bodenham, Lord and Lady Stafford, Mr. and Mrs. Monteith, Lord and Lady Denbigh, and others, whose ways convinced me gradually that I should not be leaping into any strange gulf of uncongenial life if I became a Catholic, but no one helped me nearly so much to remove this fear as a lady whom I met in this society, and who afterwards became my wife . . .

The quest had been fulfilled and his prayers answered.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Second Marriage

ROME in 1864. Ageless and dirty, and yet sometimes unbelievably beautiful. So Coventry Patmore probably thought as he walked in the Pincian Gardens and leaned over the balustrade, looking at that dream-like vista of the whole city from across the Piazza del Popolo.

Already he had come to love this city, despite 'its scrubby outside'. Whilst, like all his generation, he did not appreciate the loveliness of the baroque, yet he could not fail to be ravished by the splendour of the setting: the clear brilliant light of Rome which tips the buildings and columns with colour; the hills crowned with cypress; the splendid decay of the Foro Romano; the ever fresh fountains which fill the city with the sound of cascades and cleanse the dusty air. He could hardly avoid being moved by his environment. Even the lady of his choice was transfigured against such a background. In his excited imagination, the charming, gracious Miss Marianne Byles became endowed with a rare beauty. 'I had never beheld so beautiful a personality, and this beauty seemed to be the pure effulgence of Catholic Sanctity,' he wrote in his autobiography. Miraculously enough he found echoes of his beloved Emily in this charming stranger. Writing in the ode *Tired Memory* he said:

My heart was dead
Dead of devotion and tired memory,
When a strange grace of thee
In a fair stranger . . .

And so the fear, which is love's chilly dawn,
Flushed faintly upon lids that dropp'd like thine,
And made me weak,
By thy delusive likeness drawn.

Second Marriage

This woman who suddenly appeared in Coventry Patmore's life, and so changed it, was in the early forties. She was shy and retiring. She had a look of calm serenity, and 'her manner and movements gave an impression of mild stateliness and not ungraceful dignity. Her features were finely cut without being of extreme beauty. She was a good musician, and played the piano with taste and execution. . . . She had received a good literary education, and her standard of taste was independent and high.' In fact she was the perfect Victorian matron and possessed all the qualities that Coventry Patmore admired in a woman. She was the daughter of James Byles, of Bowden Hall, Gloucestershire, who had died when she was thirteen, leaving her a considerable fortune. On the father's death, his daughter and widow had moved to Lavington, in Sussex.

We are not told where or how Marianne and Coventry met in Rome. She was a convert to Catholicism, and undoubtedly they met in one of the English Catholic circles to which Aubrey de Vere had introduced Coventry Patmore.

It so happened that the vicar of Lavington-with-Graffham, in Sussex, was an ambitious ecclesiastic, one Archdeacon Manning. Miss Byles and the Vicar soon became friends, and he took a great interest in her. He gave her special instruction in both secular and spiritual matters, and he even taught her drawing. It was soon apparent to all their friends that Manning exercised a great influence over her, and it was thought that they would marry, and she would become his second wife.

Any such idea was shattered by Manning's conversion to Catholicism in 1851. Two years later, Miss Byles followed his example, being received into the Communion by Father Brownhill, S.J., the same priest who had performed this office for Manning.

Cardinal Manning's influence continued with Marianne Byles until her death, and this is undoubtedly the reason why Patmore never liked Manning. Consequently, he could write to Woolner on Manning's death:

Poor Cardinal! It is wonderful how he imposed on mankind by the third-century look of him, and his infinite muddle-headedness, which passed for mystery. I knew him well, and am convinced that he was the very minutest soul that ever

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buzzed in so high a place. He was a good man according to his capacity; but he hated all whom he suspected of being able to take his measure; and latterly I was not at all in his good books. . . .

Meantime, her mother dead, Miss Byles, accompanied by her cousin, Miss Eisdell, as companion, travelled a great deal about the Continent, and in 1864 they visited Rome.

Patmore's meeting with Miss Byles was all that was needed to convert him. Their attraction for each other was instant. She had a quiet patrician kind of beauty that charmed the lonely poet, and she, herself, was fascinated and quite overwhelmed. They were both about the same age. She, actually, was a year older than he, having been born on June 23rd, 1822.

By this time, Coventry Patmore's personality had developed a power and brilliance that must have dazzled the somewhat shy and retiring lady. His appearance was very striking. His head had a maturity that emphasised the magnificent modelling of his features, and the drooping eyelid over one of his eyes and the wilful passionate mouth gave his face a sardonic and arresting expression.

After a short acquaintance, which progressed rapidly to intimate friendship [he records in his autobiography] I asked her to be my wife. Her reply was that she was under a formal religious promise never to marry, having placed, by the hands of a priest, her written undertaking to that effect upon the altar and under the Chalice containing the Blessed Sacrament. I thought this answer final, not having any idea how easily such undertakings are dispensed within the Catholic Church, provided they are not Monastic. . . .

Patmore was still wavering on the brink of conversion, and one cannot help feeling that Miss Byles held out his different faith as a barrier to their marriage. For soon the decision was taken. He, himself, relates how it happened. After Miss Byles' refusal, he records,

I continued, but in much depression of spirits, my hitherto line of meditation, with the same alternation of periods of repulsion and attraction, and the same apparent hopelessness of reconciling reason and conscience, till one night, as I was sitting alone at my hotel, it struck me that nothing would ever bring



MARIANNE CAROLINE PATMORE.
From a pencil drawing by John Brett, R.A., 1871

Second Marriage

about this reconciliation except the act of submission, and this act certainly would do so. . . .

For the first time, I felt that I was able, and that I ought to take this leap—not into the dark, indeed, but into light which obscured no less effectively the future; and fearing that the clearness in which my path now for the first time lay before me, might become obscured, I set off to the house of the Jesuits, and insisted on being admitted, though it was long after the hour at which rule had closed doors. Father Cardella refused to receive me as a Catholic there and then, but I made my general confession to him, and was received a day or two afterwards . . .

Now, there was no real barrier to their marriage, and they became engaged. However, a slight comedy followed as Coventry Patmore suddenly discovered that Miss Byles, instead of being the poor companion of a rich lady, as he thought her to be, was in reality an heiress. His pride revolted at the idea, and he left Rome in great distress. Presumably he was afraid that he would be accused of marrying Miss Byles for her money.

Eager friends followed him in his flight, and soon smoothed over the momentary embarrassment. He returned to Rome, and as soon as arrangements were fixed for the marriage, his bride-to-be advised him to return to England and prepare his children for the change in their domestic life. For Mary Patmore (as she was always called) looked forward to taking charge of his six children, and was eager to try and take the place of their dead mother. It is to her credit that she did succeed in her aim, and whilst she lived she made a happy and charming home for all the family.

Coventry Patmore's second marriage may appear strange to the superficial observer. But it must be remembered that Emily Patmore had wished him to marry again after her death, and she had even brought up her children to expect it. In a letter written not long before she died she said to her husband of a second marriage:

There will be no change from one rule to the other, so fatal to discipline and good feeling. You will be able to help and advise with a freedom you could never do to a stranger, and your dear wife, whom you will love as a friend, will soon learn that her best way of expressing her love for you will be to

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watch tenderly over your little lambs—and surely she must have a hard heart who will not love such pretty and amiable children as ours. . . . I have brought the children to look forward to your second marriage as a probable and desirable thing. They will not prejudice their new Mother against them by giving her an ill reception. The two little ones will feel her to be their natural parent. May God bless you and keep you and direct you in this and all your steps.

Emily Patmore, with her rare feminine insight, had also foreseen his conversion to Rome. One of her last remarks to her husband had been: 'When I am gone—they [the priests] will get you, and then I shall see you no more', and we read in his notes how she had refuted in conversations the arguments of Aubrey de Vere and Dr. Manning. She had a horror of Catholicism. As her husband wrote in his autobiography: 'She had been terrified from her cradle with the hideous phantoms which Puritanism conjures up when the Catholic religion is named.'

The new marriage and his conversion caused a considerable stir amongst his friends. Many of them had loved Emily Patmore, and they found it difficult to accept the second wife. His conversion caused a serious setback to his growing popularity as a poet. Anything popish was still anathema to the general British public. Even such an ardent admirer as John Ruskin wrote on December 24th, 1864:

I've been quoting you with much applause—at Manchester, but it is great nuisance that you have turned Roman Catholic—for it makes all your fine thinking so ineffectual to us English,—and to unsectarian people generally—and we wanted some good pious thinkers just now to make head against those cursed fools of conservation-of-Force Germans. But what must be—must be—if it had been me, I should have turned Turk, and taken sixteen wives—at Paris one, at Sarum three.

The last line is a parody of a passage in *The Angel in the House*, where Felix gives a list of his adolescent love affairs, and a tilt at Patmore's known pro-Turkish sympathies.

Despite these protests Coventry Patmore remained indifferent to popularity. He was absorbed in his new wife and his children, and the outer world mattered very little.

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When Miss Byles was left alone in Rome before the wedding, she read Patmore's poems and sent him the following criticism in a letter:

It makes me laugh aloud when I think of my sitting down to mark the lines I wish you would make higher in your *Angel*, hoping that you, by implication, would take in how much I thought of all the rest—how perfect in its way it seems to be. For one thing you have that very unusual gift, which I *admire* so, of saying so much in a few words. Then you strike off the very peculiarity of the thing you touch, like your *languid* little chestnut leaves; then you catch *the* effect among all others a certain thing should produce, as when—

‘A blinding flash
And close, coinstantaneous crash
Humbled the Soul.’

Then, if I may venture to say so, you touch the most delicate subjects with a purity which leaves scarcely a word to make a child's innocence wonder. A woman reading it would feel flattered; then, at times provoked; for it is a shame for you to have been initiated into a thing or two quite solely feminine.

Just before their marriage, she wrote to him:

I know that I cannot be the wife to you and the mother to her darlings that she was; but, God helping, you shall have my whole devotion, and may He make good my incapacity.

Meanwhile, Manning felt some disappointment at the sacrificing of her vocation. She had contemplated becoming a nun. Still, he recognised ‘the high character’ of her future husband, and he it was who married them on July 18th, 1864, at the Church of St. Mary of the Angels, Bayswater.

Back in London, the family was re-united, and soon they all settled in a new home at Bowden Lodge, Highgate. Commenting on the new marriage, Emily Tennyson wrote to her confidant, Thomas Woolner:

I doubt not that Mr. Patmore will make a good use of his riches. He was very generous as a poor man, and I do not

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think he will be less so as a rich. Stepmothers must in modern story be made always good, instead of always bad, as they used to be. I think one hears of so many good ones.

Mary Patmore, despite her self-effacement, was an excellent stepmother. She tried to make friends with the young children, and the youngest, Henry, soon came to regard her as his mother, as Emily Patmore had prophesied. However, Emily, the eldest daughter, puzzled the somewhat 'old-maidish' lady. She was growing up into a beautiful girl, and, as her biographer remarks: 'Emily, vivid, high-spirited, clever and original, was outside the range of her experience.'

So we see Mary Patmore established among her extraordinary new family, living in constant terror of the dogs Coventry Patmore loved to have around him, putting up with the new aviary in the garden, yet quietly enjoying her husband's quaint humour and brilliance.

She found it difficult to make new friends. However, she liked Mr. Ruskin, and he wrote her a charming letter, and she was very fond of an old friend of the family, Barry Cornwall.

Like a figure left over from the eighteenth century, the aged poet and dramatist wrote her delightful courtly and flirtatious letters. And she smiled in gratitude and sent him presents of wine. In return, he wrote:

Many thanks for your kind vinous message. On the 21st of next month (November) I shall be 78, if I live to that date, and should you in the superabundance of your kindness send me *two* bottles—observe two only,—I will drink your health in a glass of Madeira. Perhaps—if your husband is in the woods—you will send me a bit of your heart also. (I enclose you a large piece of mine.) I can scarcely write, my dear Mrs. Patmore, although I feel impelled to say more than your husband might approve. (But he is in the woods and we will forget him.)

Although I flash about like a dashing young octogenarian, I am (in prose reality) but a poor old creature, who am now preparing to taste a little opiate to allay the pain that encounters me almost every day.

Two years later, he wrote again to his 'dear Patmoria':

Sincerely I am grateful for your remembering me. Yes, on

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Sunday I entered my eightieth year. I can't speak, or write, or walk, or eat, but I can love the dear M.C. still. Shall I ever see you again? I hope so, and that you will not go among the winged-sister-angels yet.

Thus Mary Patmore hovers quietly in the background of the picture, unobtrusively pouring out her riches for the delight and comfort of her new-found husband and family, caring for the younger children, translating *St. Bernard on the Love of God*, full of good works and surprisingly enough taking an active interest in politics—like her husband, she was a staunch Conservative.

Her husband loved her, and two-and-a-half years after their marriage he wrote to her recalling their honeymoon from Tunbridge Wells:

Dear Wife:

Here is a snow-drop from the garden where I walked and sat, two years and a half ago, with my bride of a day.

I know your dear heart would glow with pleasure if you could see how mine has glowed with the thought of the happiness I have had and have in you. I asked last night of Her, by whose intercession I think it was that I obtained you (and you know it was the first prayer I ever offered to Her) that *two* loves and *two* possessions might survive death, and not in any way contradict each other. Why not?

Believe me, I could not love you more had I never loved another.

My dear, I may say

'I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not "Honor"** more.'

C.P.

*Honoria the heroine of the *Angel* as identified with his wife Emily.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The Squire

‘THE Troubadour of St. Mary had become a fine old English gentleman.’ This remark of Sir Shane Leslie’s symbolises the transition that was now to take place in Coventry Patmore’s life.

Towards the end of 1865, a slight weakness in one lung, and the cessation of the necessity to earn a living, caused Patmore to resign his appointment at the British Museum. He decided to live in the country, and soon found an estate that appealed to him situated in his favourite county—Sussex.

He had always longed to play the rôle of the landed country gentleman. A medieval Tory at heart, his ideal had always been the cultured Englishman who administered his estates with a wise benevolence, and yet, at the same time, interested himself in life and the arts. A fierce individualist, he had little patience with the reforms and the growing socialism of his day. He summed up his political views in a later essay called *Courage in Politics*:

All men are born believers in aristocracy. Who is there—out of the House of Commons—who does not hold the fundamental dogma of politics that the best should govern? Modern democracy means nothing but the possession of the elective power by ignorant aristocrats, by those who desire that the best should govern but have no sufficient means of discovering the best.

Patmore, in announcing the above, used the word ‘aristocracy’ in its widest sense. He believed in an aristocracy of talent rather than of birth. But his early contact with the literary and social salons of the early nineteenth century had left him with a deep respect for that great eighteenth-century tradition of an educated aristocracy—the remnants of which

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had survived into the early nineteenth. He had little faith in the creative powers of the masses and was pessimistic about the possibilities of democratic government. In another later essay, he wrote: 'Democracy is only a continually shifting aristocracy of money, impudence, animal energy, and cunning, in which the best grub gets the carrion.' In his search for the ideal type of benevolent aristocrat he had gone back through English history and ever since his youth, he had had a profound admiration for Sir Thomas Browne and Sir Kenelm Digby. It is significant that even the hero of *The Angel in the House*—Felix—is a young aristocrat. In fact, Frederick Page traces 'Felix's' descent from Sir Kenelm Digby and quotes a remarkable article by Patmore on Digby and Venetia Stanley written for the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1848, which shows Patmore's great admiration for these Jācobeans:

They were a remarkable pair, and well suited to each other. They were both high-born, noble in appearance, and of a temperament the liberality of which amounted to moral laxity. We read the story of their love, as it has been recorded by Sir Kenelm himself, with a feeling akin to that with which we look upon a rose just blown and covered with morning dew; everything is young, fresh and generous, and it is with difficulty that we abstain from admiring in our hearts that which it is impossible for our judgments to approve.

The young Patmore then goes on to quote Clarendon's description of his hero: 'Digby was in every way fitted for a lady's love. His presence drew the eyes of all men upon him, which were more fixed by a wonderful graceful behaviour, a flowing courtesy and a civility, and such a volubility of language as surprised and delighted.'

Curiously enough, Coventry Patmore was ideally suited by temperament for the rôle he now undertook. He was an able administrator and he had a keen sense of business inherited from his grandfather the jeweller. As a poor man he had always been punctilious about paying his debts, and now he handled his wife's riches with great ability and even increased their capital value. He also had a deep sense of the responsibilities belonging to his class. Frank Harris noted that 'Patmore regarded the servants in his own house like his children'.

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The property he took over contained nearly four hundred acres, and was in reality two adjoining estates which he united. It was situated four miles from Uckfield on the borders of Ashdown Forest. This estate, which Patmore re-named Heron's Ghyll after the birds haunting the pond in the garden, was in a very dilapidated condition. Nothing daunted, the new owner determined to re-build the existing house. It will be remembered that he had definite views on architecture and had written many essays on this subject in his youth. His family was left in London. Emily and Gertrude were sent to a Franciscan Convent, and he himself went down to Uckfield to take charge of the alterations.

The land with which Patmore had to deal is of great natural beauty [Basil Champneys records] which, however, had never been turned to full account. The house stood at some distance from and slightly above a depression which carried a small trickle of water, while at the lower end of the ground was a long wooded dell with about half a mile of trout-stream at the bottom. The house itself, though it possessed in the older parts some attractive features, was hampered by outbuildings, which were objectionable on sanitary as well as aesthetic grounds. A pile of badly built stabling choked the principal front; and the old farm-buildings were placed close behind the house. The problem before him was to make his house healthy, habitable, and architecturally pleasing; to convert the land adjoining it from its aspect of a somewhat neglected farm into the suitable setting of a gentleman's residence; to master all the details of agricultural management, game preserving, and the duties of a landlord; and to do all this with extreme economy, so that each step taken might enhance the value of the estate by more than the expenditure.

The next two years found Patmore immersed in all these occupations. The house was rebuilt in the Gothic style but it had none of the over-elaborate details which ruin so many Victorian buildings. It was extremely simple in character and depended for its charm on 'good material and proportion—on solidity and refinement of detail' and on the soft yellow stone with which it was built. However, Victorian taste obtruded in the drawing-room bay-windows which were decorated with medallions of stained glass to represent the 'seven heroines

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of poetry'—Eve, Helen, Dido, Kriemhild, Guinevere, Laura, and Beatrice. We are not told who designed them, but his daughter, Emily, served as a model for one. Like most of his contemporaries Patmore suffered from these unexpected lapses into bad taste, and at one period he even contemplated having the Elgin marbles copied so that he could use them as a frieze in one of his rooms.

A special study was made for the poet in one corner of the house, but as this did not prove secluded enough, he built himself a hermitage in a wood some little distance from the house, to which he would retire for solitude—like Tennyson to his summer-house at Farringford. This hermitage was made



of timber, thickly thatched, and lined throughout with varnished match-boarding. It also had a large fireplace which the poet liked to have plentifully supplied with wooden logs. No one was allowed to enter or touch this retreat. As Champneys says: 'Of this [the hermitage] he jealously kept the key, and allowed no servant to enter it; nor was it swept by any hands but his own, unless, as a rare privilege, he allowed his eldest daughter now and then to be his housemaid. His family and visitors were, however, occasionally admitted to tea there by special invitation.' It was here that he wrote some of his most celebrated Odes.

Heron's Ghyll, now a school, was a lordly house and re-

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flected Patmore's inner desires. He also indulged in his passion for animals and birds by building a large aviary in the gardens and by keeping a number of big dogs which were the terror of Mary Patmore.

At last he was happy again. His health had become much better and he was exhilarated by his many country-life activities. A letter to his wife shows how much he enjoyed his new rôle:

Yesterday I had my last harvest thrashed out. We thrashed 170 sacks in about twelve hours I think, that when we have got used to the steam engine we shall not think it unpoetical. I am sure Goethe would have made a splendid passage out of the *rapidity* with which the hopes of the long year are 'realised': the grain pouring from the many mouths of the machine all at once, the numbers of men feeding the furnace, oiling the machine, tying up the sacks as they fill, building up the mountainous stacks of straw, the sacks accumulating in the barn, etc. It is a very invigorating sight and I wish that you were there to see it.

His mind, too, was kindled with new inspiration, and he was beginning to compose his greatest work—*The Odes*. He had always loved the countryside. Now, he could watch the seasons come and recede to his heart's content. Sir Shane Leslie writes:

Patmore revelled in his country estate. He took to quarrying stone and breeding trout. He sallied forth to encounter poachers, the traditional foes of country gentlemen, armed with the traditional horse-pistols. His grass lawns were designed upon principles taken from the Parthenon, for he had discovered that there are no true horizontals in architecture. From experience he confirmed the strange rumour of Isaac Walton that a frog would scratch out a pike's eye with its implanted elbow. As a loving wood-reeve, he protested against the ignorant legislation permitting the destruction of English timber. The beauties and splendour of Nature were never lost to him. . . .

He even loved the country landscape when it was sunk in Winter. His lovely ode to *Winter* witnesses the fullness with

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which he felt and understood the ever-changing moods of the Seasons.

I, singularly moved
To love the lovely that are not beloved,
Of all the Seasons, most
Love Winter, and to trace
The sense of the Trophonian pallor on her face.
It is not death, but plenitude of peace;
And the dim cloud that does the world enfold
Hath less the characters of dark and cold
Than warmth and light asleep,
And correspondent breathing seems to keep
With the infant harvest, breathing soft below
Its eider coverlet of snow.
Nor is in field or garden anything
But, duly look'd into, contains serene
The substance of things hoped for, in the Spring,
And evidence of Summer not yet seen.
On every chance-mild day
That visits the moist shaw,
The honeysuckle, 'sdaining to be crost
In urgence of sweet life by sleet or frost,
'Voids the time's law
With still increase
Of leaflet new, and little wandering spray;
Often, in sheltering brakes,
As one from rest disturb'd in the first hour,
Primrose or violet bewilder'd wakes,
And deems 'tis time to flower;
Though not a whisper of her voice he hear,
The buried bulb does know
The signals of the year,
And hails far Summer with his lifted spear,
The gorse-field dark, by sudden, gold caprice,
Turns, here and there, into a Jason's fleece;
Lilies, that soon in Autumn slipp'd their gowns of green,
And vanished into earth
And come again, ere Autumn died, to birth,
Stand full-array'd, amidst the wavering shower,
And perfect for the Summer, less the flower;
In nook of pale or crevice of crude bark,
Thou canst not miss,
If close thou spy, to mark

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The ghostly chrysalis,
That, if thou touch it, stirs in its dream dark ;
And the flush'd Robin, in the evenings hoar,
Does of Love's Day, as if he saw it, sing ;
But sweeter yet than dream or song of Summer or Spring
Are Winter's sometime smiles, that seem to well
From infancy ineffable ;
Her wandering, languorous gaze,
So unfamiliar, so without amaze,
On the elemental, chill adversity,
The uncomprehended rudeness ; and her sigh
And solemn, gathering tear,
And look of exile from some great repose, the sphere
Of ether, moved by ether only, or
By something still more tranquil.

As he wrote to his wife in 1868 on the completion of the house :

Dearest,

I do think we shall be very happy here. Everything is so calm and 'slow' and suited to my rest-loving mind. The climate too seems unlike any I have yet known for my health. The air is so pure and thin that my brain is still in a state of pleasant intoxication with it, and no exposure—even without exercise—to damp and cold, shows the slightest tendency to bring back the itching in my throat, which has completely left me.

You will be surprised at the effect of my alterations in the grounds—even in the very unfinished state you will see them in. Constable seems to think I work by a fairy's wand. Wood's foreman is always here, but every idea is mine, and it is lucky I remained, for his ideas would not have pleased us so well, I think

The family once more re-united, life at Heron's Ghyll took on a very patriarchal form. Coventry Patmore, growing older, had become very autocratic. The life of the whole community revolved round the wishes of the great man, happy and secure on his Sussex acres. Life was very quiet, regular and deceptively simple—for there were several conflicts hidden beneath the exterior of this rural household. My grandfather, Tennyson

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Patmore, has left some notes about the family life at this period which describe its outward pattern.

Each morning, Patmore rose at seven and went to hear Mass in his private chapel. He always wore the same kind of clothes, a velvet tailed coat, and an old type of Victorian stand-up loose collar with a horizontal black tie. At breakfast, the poet was usually silent and no one, neither his wife nor his children, dared speak unless they were addressed first. The day would be spent in attending to details of the estate, or in walks through the grounds with his favourite daughter, Emily or possibly in a drive to one of the neighbours. Mary Patmore was already receding into the background—never very strong, she was now a semi-invalid.

He loved to take his friends and members of his family for drives in the surrounding country. He drove himself, and friends report that at this period he was often ‘as merry as a schoolboy’. But he was a careless driver and often became lost in his own thoughts. Champneys relates:

On one occasion Patmore was taking his wife for a drive; they went on and on into unfamiliar regions; evening began to fall: Patmore showed no sign of turning, and was evidently quite self-absorbed, unconscious of his position, of the growing darkness, of all but his own thoughts. Mrs. Patmore tried in vain to rouse him. She spoke to him: he did not answer: shook him, with as little result; then, as a last resource, she took the reins and stopped the horse. This brought her husband to his bearings, and he found himself in a region quite unknown to him, and almost in darkness. Presently a rustic came on the scene and Patmore asked him the way to Heron’s Ghyll. The answer was, ‘I don’t rightly know; but if you go on as you’re going, you’ll be *drownded*.’

In the evening, the family and any visitors there might be, would gather round the great fireplace in the hall, and the poet would play a game of whist. Or perhaps, one of his daughters would read to him. He was very fond of contemporary novels and in later years he became a great admirer of the works of Thomas Hardy and Henry James. The family retired early. By ten o’clock everyone was made to go to bed.

Outwardly he was happy. But the Odes written at this time

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betray an inner conflict. He was still tormented by memories of his first wife, Emily, and he was disturbed by his growing knowledge of the mysteries of love. Hidden away behind the shelves in the library at Heron's Ghyll was a complete set of the privately printed books of the *Eroticon Biblion Society*—re-prints of the forbidden masterpieces of the world's erotic literature, which showed him the dangers of passion, and it is known that he astonished his contemporaries by asserting that he found Crebillon Fils a good Catholic. Although he found comfort in his Church and the material surroundings of his home, he had moments of great loneliness and of those spiritual doubts experienced by every true mystic.

His children too were growing up. His eldest daughter, Emily, was now a beautiful girl 'with fine dark eyes and a rich and beautifully modulative voice', but she was inclined to be dreamy and meditative. Physically she reminded him of her dead mother, and her quick intelligence made her an ideal companion. Mary Patmore tried to be a companion to him but it was his daughter Emily who could follow him on his flights into mystical thought, and he loved her more now than ever, and he felt a rare bond of understanding between them. She it was who had reconciled the younger children to his second marriage, and now as she grew up she became his constant companion and confidant.

Emily was the first person to hear of the new Odes he was writing. They used to go for long walks together and it was during these that he discussed his new verse. Familiar with his earlier work, she was quick to appreciate their new beauties. They talked of new metres, and he explained to her the merits of what he felt to be his metrical discovery, which he called 'catalectic' metre. A mystic and contemplative by nature, Emily could understand the mystical raptures of these new poems, and she was well-versed in his particular philosophy of human and divine love. She realised this new work was merely a continuation of the old and her evident enjoyment of it gave Patmore intense pleasure. In fact, her sympathy and understanding drew her even closer to him. She no longer went to school. Instead, her father taught her. They studied mathematics and natural science, as well as Latin and modern languages. But their chief interest was literature, for she too

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wrote verse. However, everything that she wrote was noted down in secret. Yet another child, Henry, was to show promise of becoming a poet, and he and his sister Emily were Coventry Patmore's two favourite children.

At times, the devoted father would become anxious about his favourite daughter. There were moments when she seemed to lose interest in the world around her. She would want to be alone; she would become dreamy and abstracted. Then the mood would pass and she would be gay and almost tomboyish again.

The atmosphere at Heron's Ghyll varied as the years went by. There were happy days when all the children dressed up and acted plays for the amusement of their parents. Then Emily was the leader and organised the theatricals. She wrote the plays, painted the scenery, and even made marionettes for her younger brothers and sisters. But there were other days when a storm-cloud seemed to lie over the household. Emily, loving her family as she did and ever sensitive to their feelings, must have been disturbed when these signs of disunity appeared. She knew that her two elder brothers, Milnes and Tennyson Patmore, had never approved of their father's second marriage, and their rare visits to the house usually led to friction. Milnes Patmore, now a grown-up sailor, was particularly bitter. He could never forgive his father for the *Britannia* incident. Both Coventry and Mary Patmore did what they could to win the young man over, but he remained aloof and on the defensive. Mary Patmore, for all her tact and generosity, was a dim figure compared with Milnes' mother, and she had little experience of handling grown-up young men like Milnes and Tennyson. In these moments of tension, Emily would retire into a mood of wounded silence.

When Emily was sixteen, her parents became alarmed by her growing moods and abstraction, and thought that she needed a change. Accompanied by Harriet Robson, a girl a few years older than Emily, they left—a party of four—for the Continent in the autumn of 1869. Fourteen years later, Miss Robson was destined to become the third Mrs. Coventry Patmore.

The Patmores had come to know Harriet Robson as she lived close by with her family in Lewes. There were few Catho-

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lic families, living in Sussex, and their common religion had drawn them together. Educated at the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus at St. Leonard's-on-Sea, she was pretty, a devout Catholic, intelligent and full of humour. But she was poor and very ambitious. She had soon become Emily's intimate friend and confidante, and there is every evidence that she was genuinely fond of the younger girl. At the same time, Miss Robson with her youth and intelligence amused and attracted the ageing poet. Mary Patmore seems to have been unaware of the menace, but both Milnes and Tennyson Patmore resented the inclusion in the travelling party of this girl who had the cleverness and youthful audacity of a *Becky Sharp*.*

In the course of their continental tour, during which Coventry and Mary Patmore and the two girls visited Lucerne, Fribourg, Strasbourg, and the towns on the Rhine, Emily confided to her friend that she wanted to become a nun. Coventry Patmore, however, was ignorant of his daughter's intentions, and was determined that the two girls should enjoy themselves. As Emily's biographer wrote:

He put aside the rôle of guide and philosopher to play that of a friend and became the most delightful of companions. He planned excursions, made up nonsense rhymes, and added to the pleasure of everything by his whimsical comments.

We read also in Emily's journal of strenuous expeditions up and down the mountains in Switzerland, and of how

at last we came to a chalet overlooking the 'Mer de Glace'. There we ate and drank. Then Mama and I went on the ice. Papa and Miss Robson turned giddy and would not come.

Already Coventry Patmore was drifting into the arms of the younger woman. Did he realise his coming infatuation? It seems unlikely, for he was genuinely devoted to Mary Patmore and was a man who prided himself on his moral behaviour. It is more probable that Harriet Robson played her cards cleverly. She was poor and she needed work. She may have profited by these moments alone to suggest that she could act

*I am indebted to my grandmother, Mrs. Tennyson Patmore, for these details of Harriet Robson's character.

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as governess to the younger children, and it was well known that Mary Patmore was not strong and needed feminine help in running the house. The fact remains that she was engaged as governess a little while later.

On their return to Heron's Ghyll, Patmore decided that Emily needed the companionship of girls of her own age. It was decided that she should be sent to a convent as a finishing school before she was presented in society. She was taken to see various convents and schools and was allowed to choose the one she liked best. Probably on the advice of her friend, Miss Robson, she chose the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus at St. Leonard's.

Directly she had gone back to school, her father began to miss her. He wrote to her at the Convent:

I am very glad to find from your letters to Mama and me that you are likely to be very happy at the Convent. You will find it very new and very pleasant to have so many girls who will really be companions for you. We miss you very much here. Half the household seems to have gone away with you.

Meanwhile, life went on very much the same at home. Coventry Patmore took very little interest in the outside world. He was wrapped deep in contemplation, and he read a great deal in the privacy of his hermitage. The Catholic mystical writers occupied most of his attention. He pondered over St. Thomas Aquinas, whose works he owned in the splendid vellum copy that had once belonged to Pius the Fifth and had passed to Philip of Spain. He later presented this copy to the British Museum in reparation for hours wasted in official service.

Swedenborg, St. Bernard, and St. John of the Cross, were other writers who were intimately studied. His conversion to Catholicism doubtless influenced all his reading. He was beginning to discover a solution of the problem of human and divine love, a problem that had obsessed him all his life. Here, at last, in the doctrines of Catholic mysticism, he was to find the key to the riddle.

Infatuated with the love of God, he beheld a vision of Heaven, where earthly and divine love mingled in the person

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of *The Husband of the Heavens*. Enraptured, he cried out in the amazing Ode, *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore*, written at this period:

Love, light for me
Thy ruddiest blazing torch,
That I, albeit a beggar by the Porch
Of the glad Palace of Virginity,
May gaze within, and sing the pomp I see ;
For, crowned with roses all,
'Tis there, O Love, they keep thy festival !

By 1868, he had written nine Odes :

1. *Prophets Who Cannot Sing*
2. *Felicia*
3. *Tired Memory*
4. *Faint Yet Pursuing*
5. *Pain*
6. *The Two Deserts*
7. *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore*
8. *Dead Language*
9. 1867

In the April of this year, he printed these nine Odes for private circulation, and sent them out to all his friends and anyone whom he thought they might interest. The poems were simply bound in pale green covers, and were signed 'C.P.' The Odes met with little response, even from his best friends and most devoted admirers. He was bitterly disappointed.

Meanwhile, he was faced with a crisis in his domestic life. Emily, on her return from the Convent, astounded her father by telling him that she wished to take the veil and enter the Convent of the Holy Child. It was a cruel shock. Emily was the one person he loved most in the world, and now she proposed banishing herself from the world and from him. He needed her companionship so badly. In 1870, he wrote to her whilst she was still away at school :

I refuse to take your warning that you will never be the least nice in any way, or do anything but things that are of no use. . . . I am looking forward with great and anxious hope to

The Squire

Midsummer. I am getting very tired of walking all alone in my new-made paradise, for Mama is rarely well enough or at leisure to walk with me.

During the summer holidays of this year, father and daughter discussed the whole question of her religious vocation. Coventry Patmore felt she was too young to know her own mind. He decided that she must see the world first, and then, should she still desire to become a nun, he would not oppose her will. She agreed to his proposals.

However, her mind was made up, and, by a cruel irony, Coventry Patmore, so wrapped in the Catholic mysteries, was now to witness their effect on one of his own children.

Christmas came round, and amid all the festivities at Heron's Ghyll these anxieties were forgotten. A large party of friends had been invited down for the holiday. As was their habit, the children performed theatricals for the amusement of their elders. One sister, Gertrude, was away at school in Germany, and Emily herself in a letter to her sister describes how, 'Because of all the visitors coming, Bertha and I are to find beds where we can, which I always like. It makes me feel so independent and ethereal.'

On Twelfth Night, the children decided to act some scenes from *Kenilworth*. Emily took the part of Amy Robsart. A guest who saw her that night described her as looking 'very lovely in a clinging white robe, her only ornament a girdle of trailing ivy and a close snood of ivy binding her curls'.

During the evening, the girl who was impersonating Queen Elizabeth slipped away from the ballroom where everyone was gaily dancing, and crept into the private chapel of the house. There she found Emily, still in her dress as Amy Robsart, lying prostrated in front of the altar, sobbing aloud, and praying that she might go back to her beloved Convent.

Both girls eventually took the veil.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The Unknown Eros

What rumour'd heavens are these
Which not a poet sings,
O, Unknown Eros? . . .

COVENTRY PATMORE now entered the darkest period of his whole poetical career. Just at the moment when he felt at the height of his powers, the friends who had so rapturously admired *The Angel in the House* turned a deaf ear to his new poems. Ardent admirers of his talent, such as Aubrey de Vere, strongly disapproved of them. Even Ruskin failed to appreciate them at first. He recognised 'nobleness' in the new work, but without any real enthusiasm. 'And others,' as Gosse writes, 'like Tennyson, perceived nothing.'

Yet he himself felt that in using this new metre he had discovered something new in poetry. He wrote to Champneys:

The beauty and incomparable variety of the metre opens up quite a new prospect to me of the possibilities of poetry. . . . I have hit upon the first metre that ever was invented, and on the finest mine of wholly unworked material that ever fell to the lot of an English poet.

Gosse surmises the reason why the Odes were so neglected was that in 1868

All England had its ears open to the brilliant melodies of Mr. Swinburne; no other music could be heard. . . . Yet it seems amazing that among all the initiates and experts to whom the little pamphlet was sent there should not have been one who perceived, as a portent, the beauty of *Deliciae Sapientiae de Amore*, or was amused by the audacity which described the year 1867, with its Reform Bill and its Disraeli as Chancellor of the Exchequer, as:

The Unknown Eros

'Year of the Great Crime,
When the false English nobles and their Jew,
By God demented, slew
The trust they stood thrice pledged to keep from wrong.'

Naturally, Patmore was disillusioned by the reception given to the privately-printed *Odes*. Two years later, in 1870, sitting one day in front of the fire in the great hall at Heron's Ghyll, he decided to destroy what copies remained of this special edition. Having collected all the copies he could find, he made a bonfire of them, and sat in front of the fire moodily contemplating their destruction.

Few copies of this edition survived the bonfire, although Emily managed to save a small number. For this reason the slight little volume in pale green covers—*Odes* (not published) with a short prefaced signed C.P.—is (according to Sir Edmund Gosse) one of the rarest of all Victorian editions. In a short preface Patmore says 'I meant to have extended and developed this series of *Odes* until they formed an integral work expressing an idea which I have long had at heart; but feelings which are partly conveyed by the concluding piece have discouraged me from fulfilling my intention, and I now print these fragments of the proposed poem for private distribution among the few persons who are likely to care for them as they stand'.

Despite the frigid reception given to these *Odes*, Patmore did not stop experimenting with his new metre. He quietly went on writing. And in 1877 *The Unknown Eros*, his most important work, appeared.

As he grew older, he became very critical of his earlier work, and in 1873, he bought in all the remaining stock of *The Angel in the House* from the publishers, Messrs. Macmillan. These were burnt on yet another bonfire.

This passion for perfection in writing which animated him throughout his life undoubtedly contributed another reason for the public neglect from which he now suffered. There are some revealing lines in his notes about revision of his work in which he says: 'I am in danger of degrading the truth and force of my work to meet the judgment of ignorant, careless, and often incompetent critics. Above all let me satisfy myself.'

Basil Champneys tells us that the withdrawal from circula-

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tion of *The Angel in the House* was due to Patmore's fear that part of its philosophy might not be in keeping with the tenets of the Catholic dogma. However, in 1886, he realised that this sacrifice had been too impetuous and declared 'that he had not one word to alter in order to bring *The Angel* into harmony with Catholic truth and feeling'.

I am inclined to think that this withdrawal was also due to the violent change and growth of Patmore's critical powers. By this time, he had completely shaken off the influence of Tennyson. It is significant that much of the *Angel* was revised and rewritten before it was reissued in the collected edition of his poems, although he relied a great deal on the advice of Gerard Manley Hopkins when making his revision.

Moreover, there is no doubt that ever since the death of his first wife, Emily Patmore, in 1862, his muse had been leading him in a new direction, although his philosophy was the same. Poems like *The Toys*, *Tired Memory*, *The Azalea*, and *Departure*, which form such an important part of *The Unknown Eros* in that they display a new facet of Patmore's genius, all had their beginnings during the sad and lonely period he experienced after her death.

This is proved by a note found among his papers and dated August 23rd, 1862 :

Last night I dreamt that she was dying; awoke with unspeakable relief that it was a dream; but a moment after to remember that she was dead.

This was written six weeks after Emily Patmore's death. It is interesting to compare this note with the lovely Ode *The Azalea* which appeared in the 1877 edition of *The Unknown Eros*:

There, where the sun shines first
Against our room,
She train'd the gold Azalea, whose perfume
She, Spring-like, from her breathing grace dispersed.
Last night the delicate crests of saffron bloom,
For this their dainty likeness watch'd and nurst,
Were just at point to burst.
At dawn I dream'd, O God, that she was dead,

The Unknown Eros

And groan'd aloud upon my wretched bed,
And waked, ah, God, and did not waken her,
But lay, with eyes still closed,
Perfectly bless'd in the delicious sphere
By which I knew so well that she was near,
My heart to speechless thankfulness composed.
Till 'gan to stir
A dizzy somewhat in my troubled head—
It *was* the azalea's breath, and she *was* dead!
The warm night had the lingering buds disclosed,
And I had fall'n asleep with to my breast
A chance-found letter press'd
In which she said,
'So till tomorrow eve, my Own, adieu!
Parting's well-paid with soon again to meet,
Soon in your arms to feel so small and sweet,
Sweet to myself that am so sweet to you!'

Gosse, commenting on this poem, writes :

This is a poem scarcely to be read, even for the tenth time, without tears, and we can hardly find a better example of several of Patmore's finest qualities, the extreme tensity of his emotion, the courage with which he bends familiar images and experiences to his art, and the singular distinction of the symbolism which he borrows from external nature. Even more harrowing in its expression of the hopeless longing for those who have been taken from us, which the ancients knew as *desiderium*, is the longer ode entitled *Departure*, in which memory recapitulated the actual circumstances of the death of the beloved.

Meanwhile, the composition of these new poems was interrupted by domestic changes. His estate of Heron's Ghyll had become too expensive. He was continually adding and making alterations to it, and in 1874, he sold the property to the Duke of Norfolk for £27,000, thereby making a net profit of £9,000 on his original investment.

All Patmore's biographers mention this fact with pride, as it is one of the rare instances in which a poet has excelled in a business transaction. It was indeed a quite remarkable achievement considering that before Patmore took over the estate he had led an entirely literary existence. He himself was so

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elated over his success as a landowner that he wrote and published a pamphlet *On How I Managed and Improved my Estate*.

Another reason for the sale of Heron's Ghyll may have been that his family was almost grown up. Milnes was away at sea. Tennyson was soon to become a doctor. Emily and Gertrude were at school. The large house seemed sad and lonely with such a diminished family.

Living in the depths of the country, cut off from friends, and ignored by the reading public, he was often overcome with an Olympian despair. In 1870, he could write to his old friend, Mrs. Gemmer, known to the public as the poetess 'Gerda Fay' :

I am glad to see that you still have the heart and hope enough left to write and print—when you see what the public likes—I am become utterly idle through utter hopelessness. A youth of hearty endeavour to be useful seems to have been quite a failure, and to have done neither myself nor others any good. The Gods have made us for their laughter, especially such of us as aim, in youth, at doing and being something not ignoble. They shall laugh at me no more, for henceforth I aim at nothing, and can 'wait to die', abstaining in the meanwhile from either flippancy or gloom, and hoping with Swift, that God will not damn such fools as we are.

And, even a few years later, he could write :

We do not trouble ourselves about Lord Beaconsfield or Mr. Gladstone or anything else. The 'burning' questions of the day do not burn us; for we have made up our minds that to attend to our own business exclusively is the best way of serving not only ourselves, but other people.

However, these moods soon passed. Ruskin, who came to appreciate the Odes, was one of the few friends who comforted him during this dark period. He wrote to Patmore about the new poems, 'no living being had ever done anything that helped him so much.'

In 1874, during the transference of Heron's Ghyll to the Duke of Norfolk, the Patmores came up to London, and took a furnished house on Campden Hill.

The Unknown Eros

The change did Patmore good. After years of complete retirement in the country, he sought out many of his old friends. He became a member of the Savile Club, although he was never a clubman by nature. He renewed acquaintance with Mrs. Procter and saw Lord Houghton, F. T. Palgrave, the editor of *The Golden Treasury*, Ruskin and Carlyle.

Carlyle and he had much in common. As far back as 1856, Carlyle had written to his friend :

The Public of readers, now that everybody has taken to read, and whosoever has twopence in his pocket to pay into a Circulating library, whether he have any fraction of wit in his head or not, is a sovereign Rhadamanthus of Books for the time being, has become more astonishing than ever ! Probably, there never was such a Plebs before, entitled to hold up its thumb with *vivat* or *perreat* to the poor fencers in the Literary Ring. The only remedy is not to mind them ; to set one's face against them like a flint ; for they cannot kill one, after all, tho' they think they can do it. One has to say—'Dull, impious *canaille*, it was not to please you that I was brandishing what weapons the gods gave me !' Patience, too, in this world, is a very necessary element of victory. . . . Recommending perseverance in the meantime and at all times, and what the Scotch call 'a stout heart to a steep hill'.

He had also been an early admirer of *The Angel in the House*, having written to Patmore from Gill, Cummertrees, Annan, in 1856 :

I had received your beautiful little Book, *Angel in the House*, Book II, sometime ago ; and reserved it for a good opportunity, which I saw ahead. I brought it with me into these parts, the only modern Book I took that trouble with ; and last night I gave myself the pleasure of a deliberate perusal. Upon which, so favourable was the issue, I now give you the superfluous trouble of my verdict—prior to getting into the Solway for a little swim—the *sound* of which I also hear approaching.

Certainly it is a beautiful little Piece, this 'Espousals', nearly perfect in its kind ; the execution and conception full of delicacy, truth, and graceful simplicity ; high, ingenuous, fine—pure and wholesome as these breezes now blowing round me from the eternal sea. The delineation of the thing is managed with great

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art, *thrift*, and success, by that light sketching of parts ; of which, both in the choice of what is to be delineated, and in the fresh, airy, easy way of doing it, I much admire the genial felicity, the real *skill*. A charming *simplicity* attracts me everywhere ; this is a great merit which I am used to in you.

The old friends saw each other quite often, and their friendship was maintained with the warmest feelings until Carlyle's death. Carlyle encouraged Patmore to go on writing, and in a letter to his wife, Mary, the poet wrote :

The evening with Carlyle, who was quite affectionate, he complaining two or three times, that I had not been to see him lately, and urging me to write, almost as vehemently as he would recommend most of his literary acquaintances not to do so.

Quiet evenings were spent talking at Cheyne Walk. The younger man was content to sit at the feet of the greater genius, and as Patmore himself recalled :

I was often his companion in his afternoon walks and drives, and spent many a long evening in his chimney-corner. I was a good listener, and never thought of contradicting him, any more than I should have thought of contradicting a locomotive at full speed. I was surprised to find how very few people he saw, though he appeared to be far from difficult of access. There was seldom anybody else with him when I spent my evenings at his house. I told him once that I had just finished reading his life of Frederick the Great, and I made one or two remarks showing my appreciation of it I was quite astonished by the pathetic way in which he expressed himself pleased by what I said, and his humble complaint that he had heard so few sympathetic observations concerning his great work.

It was during one of these evenings that Carlyle astonished Patmore by saying to him as he left : 'Why don't you write a history of the Anglo-Saxons? You are the only man in England who could do it.' Patmore's after comment was : 'I have not the least idea what he meant, for I know little of history, and never professed to have any interest in the Anglo-Saxons.'

The Unknown Eros

The days passed by undisturbed at Campden Hill. Patmore had his younger children with him. Little Bertha was beginning to show signs of talent as a painter. I can remember examples of her work. When I was a boy, she gave me some of her exquisitely fine water-colour drawings of shells and flowers. Ruskin thought highly of her talent and took a personal interest in her studies.

He would ride over from Denmark Hill to give her lessons in perspective. When he was away at Coniston he would send the young girl pieces of stone and moss to copy. The proud father wrote to his wife about Ruskin: 'You can't think how he seems struck with the drawing she gave you. He said: "I would give the world to be able to do anything like it!"' and he said that "William Hunt's things were coarse, and had nothing like 'the exquisite sense of beauty' shown in Bertha's work!"' Ruskin even wanted the young girl to go to stay at Coniston so that he could give her more lessons.

He frequently gave Bertha advice, as in the following letter to her father:

I am very grateful for your letter, and for the book. More I cannot say—except—even of Bertha's exquisite work—and of yours—in most cases, as finished verses. 'The Cat will mew, and the Dog will have his day.' And therefore—Bertha must bear with me, and for herself, this Cat and Dog message.

1. Never reduce Angelico angels to blow trumpets in a letter B.
2. Make your work pleasing to the simple—girl's work should never express anything but what will be generally intelligible as a daisy.
3. Are there no leaves on the earth but ivy-leaves and no Catholic missals but the Countess Yolande?*

But the London stay was soon to end. Town-life did not suit Patmore's health, and he was soon looking for another country home. In 1875, by some miraculous chance, he was offered the Milward Mansion at Hastings. This was the old Mansion House in the centre of the old town. It was the very house with the great magnolia tree spreading across its old red-brick front that he had admired as a child of six. It was the house to which he and Emily had been so much attracted

*Missal of Yolande of Navarre.

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during their honeymoon. Of course, he could not resist taking it.

He had always loved Hastings. The delightful little seaside town was full of memories for him. Far-off days now, when he and Emily had walked across the Downs to Fairlight, and taken half-forgotten exciting little expeditions out to sea. How happy they had been! Even now he could recall with rapture those long-past but ever-present emotions. He remembered his childish remark—‘One day, I shall live there’—and the dream had come true.

Soon the family were installed in their new home. Life was distinctly gayer, and the household was enlivened by the youthful presence of Harriet Robson. Patmore himself was happy, for Hastings and its surroundings re-awakened his inspiration. For several years past, he had been on the point of despair, thinking that his Muse had deserted him. Suddenly, all was well again. In fact, the period of sixteen years he was to spend at this lovely Georgian house, despite sad bereavements, was in many ways the happiest of his life. New friends, and the production of his best work, combined to give him a zest and interest in life. He was fifty-four. As Gosse writes:

His imagination, his mystical and religious vitalities were simultaneously quickened, and he walked along the sea at Hastings or over its gorse-clad downs, muttering as a young man mutters, with joy uplifting his pulse and song breaking from his lips.

Patmore wrote quickly when inspiration came to him, and in 1877 he could say joyfully: ‘I have written as much in the last three weeks as the whole of the nine Odes.’

His best poems were always composed rapidly. *The Delicia Sapientiae de Amore*, ‘one of the longest and most elaborate of the new odes,’ took only two hours to write. Some of the other poems took even less time. Examining the manuscript of *The Unknown Eros*, which is now at the British Museum, it is interesting to find that whilst some of the longer odes show frequent alterations, the manuscripts of two of Patmore’s most famous poems—*The Toys* and *Departure*—are absolutely with-

The Unknown Eros

out a single correction, as though they had been noted down in the red heat of inspiration.

Yet another cause contributed to his new-found happiness in 1877. Ever since his conversion to Catholicism he had been tormented by certain doubts, particularly in regard to the Virgin Mary. These worried him as he was contemplating a great poem, *The Child's Purchase*, in her honour. As he wrote in his religious autobiography:

I was in the habit, indeed, of addressing Her in Prayer, and believed that I had often found such prayers to be successful beyond others; but I could not abide the Rosary, and was chilled and revolted at what seemed to me the excess of many forms of devotion to Her. Good, I hoped, might come of some practical contradiction of this repugnance, some confession in act and will of what my feelings thus refused to accept. I, therefore, resolved to do the very last thing in the world which my natural inclination would have suggested.

I resolved to make an external profession of my acceptance of the Church's mind by a pilgrimage to Lourdes. This I undertook without any sensible devotion, and merely in the temper of a business man who does not leave any stone unturned when a great issue is at stake, though the prospect of attaining thereby what he seeks may seem exceedingly small. Accordingly, on the 14th October, 1877, I knelt at the shrine of the River Gave, and rose without any emotion or enthusiasm or unusual sense of devotion, but with a tranquil sense that the prayers of thirty-five years had been granted.

His religious doubts set at peace at last, Patmore returned from Lourdes full of enthusiasm and health, and longing (as Gosse says) 'to relive in the composition of poetry that vibration of ecstasy which made dreams of his days and kept him awake for joy at night'.

Back home at Hastings, the series of the Odes, thirty-one in number, on which he had been working so long, were quickly revised and polished, and at the end of this year, 1877, the book, published by Bell, appeared under the title *The Unknown Eros*.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Bride of Heaven

O how oft shalt thou complain
Of a sweet and subtle pain!
Of intolerable joys!
Of a death, in which who dies
Loves his death, and dies again . . .

—Crashaw. *A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa.*

THE Mansion House at Hastings, its old red-brick front covered with magnolia branches, stands at the top of a road leading from the sea and the old port. The house itself is protected from intruders by a high terraced garden on the side which faces the sea. Here Patmore and his family lived in happy and quiet Victorian domesticity. Life was decidedly gayer than at Heron's Ghyll. With the easy access from London, Patmore's friends could come down for week-ends. There were pleasant neighbours such as Julian Hawthorne, the son of the famous American writer, and Dykes Campbell, the biographer of Coleridge, and the painter, Inchbold.

A few miles away, looking across the old town, is the adjoining town of St. Leonard's-on-Sea. Here, at the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus, which stands on the hill overlooking the sea, discreetly veiled from the outer world by banks of hydrangeas and grassy lawns, lived his daughter Emily, now a novice in the Convent, and known as Sister Mary Christina. It is probable that the proximity of the Convent may have been yet another reason why Patmore was happy to live in Hastings.

The story of Emily Patmore's life and death is one of the saddest and strangest in all the annals of my family.

An immature daughter of the Muse [as Osbert Burdett writes in his able study], she stands beside Emily Brontë and



FAMILY GROUP AT THE MANSION, HASTINGS

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Christina Rossetti, and above Emily Dickinson, both in her life and verse. Her peculiar virtue was indeed a combination of the qualities that we meet in her namesakes, Emily and Christina.

Brought up in an intensely religious atmosphere, her highly imaginative and passionate nature strove to find some outlet: many influences worked together to drive her towards the Church. A willing and eager victim, Emily 'accomplished the terrible task,' continues Mr. Burdett, 'of turning her own nature upside down, and contorting herself to fit the Procrustean bed whereon circumstances, her obscure instincts, and the only half reluctant zeal of others, combined to pen her.'

Perhaps she was right after all. What would have become of this wilful passionate creature set down amid the stifling conditions of Victorian society? As it was, through a life devoted to God, through periods of intense self-mortification, and through ecstatic agonies almost equal to those of St. Teresa, she gave up her spirit to the 'Husband of Heaven', and all those who knew her at the Convent during her brief young life came to regard her as an uncanonised Saint. For those who desire a fuller account of her story, it is to be found in a beautifully-written and moving book called *A Daughter of Coventry Patmore: Sister Mary Christina, S.H.C.J.*, by a Religious of the same Society.

Her life reads like a medieval legend. In 1874 Coventry Patmore wisely decided to put his daughter's religious vocation to the test before allowing her to take the veil. Accordingly, in the Spring of that year, he brought her up to London, and confronted her with the gaieties of the social season. He introduced her to his old friends, and took her to the Opera, to theatres, and to other scenes of worldly distraction.

She was eighteen and very beautiful. 'Her appearance,' according to a contemporary, 'was very striking. The pale face, beautiful eyes shaded by long lashes, and the deep thoughtfulness of her brow betrayed a mind of no common order. Her lips had a firm and somewhat proud expression. Though affectionate, she was reserved. . . .' Yet, we also know that she could be gay and witty.

London life did not appeal to her. Although she had an

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exceptional power of enjoying the beauties of this world, she always felt something wanting in them. We read of her at the Opera

listening to Madame Patti, then at the height of her fame, where she sat quietly in a corner of the box with her eyes closed, apparently far away in thought. A friend who knew her well turned to her exclaiming—‘Oh, Emily, what are you thinking of? Is it not exquisite?’ ‘Yes,’ she answered, opening eyes that shone with a deep light, ‘I was thinking if a human voice can be so thrilling, what must the voices of the Angels be.’

Afterwards, alone in her room at night, and later in the Convent, she would sit down and write such lines as these from her poem *My Hour is not yet Come*:

Oh Love! How blinded then are they
Who paint Thee crowned with roses bright!
'Tis well, indeed, for such to say
That Love is still bereft of sight.
But they who on the Truth do gaze,
As well as may be here below,
Love thorny ways
Better than all the flowers that blow.
“Hora amantis illa est
Qua pro amico patitur.”

It was during this London visit that her father gave her a diamond ring. Emily always wore it as ‘a secret sign of her betrothal to Our Lord’, and would kiss it reverently as she thought of her future consecration.

So father and daughter wandered through the ceaseless turmoil of a London Season. Patmore’s conversion to Catholicism had brought him into a small aristocratic circle of old English Catholic families, but like his daughter, he did not really care for social life. He wrote to Harriet Robson, ‘Society is not my place, as you say it is. I would rather have one hour’s walk and talk with you in the garden than all the pleasure I have had from “Society” . . .’

Emily’s unusual beauty did not pass unnoticed in London. One ardent young admirer had the courage to break through her reserve and make a proposal of marriage. She refused.

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And as her biographer remarks: 'This incident she looked upon merely as a confirmation of her fidelity to Christ.'

Meanwhile her father, still bewildered by her strange moods, said of the proposal: 'I suppose it made you very happy?' Emily, wrapped in mystical contemplation, turned round his question to her own trend of thought and simply answered 'Yes'.

The period of her earthly temptations was nearly over. Coventry Patmore loved his daughter too much to see her unhappy. The London visit convinced him that her mind was set upon a convent life, and at Christmas time in 1872, he told her he was satisfied that her vocation was genuine. On the Feast of the Epiphany in 1873 he took her to the Convent of the Holy Child Jesus.

In an ecstasy of joy and thankfulness, Emily wrote in her secret note-book:

When Love makes all things easy
From the greatest to the least,
When death doth seem a bridal,
And life a lengthened feast—
O Love, how can I show my love
When love makes all things light?
'Bear patiently thy weight of joy,
And love with all thy might.'

Emily had chosen this particular religious order because it was a teaching Order, and the Nuns still maintained contact with the outside world. She felt that such a life was more Christ-like than that of the more contemplative Orders.

The Society of the Holy Child Jesus was a comparatively new Order. The Foundress of the Society was an American lady, Mother Cornelia Connelly. Pope Gregory XVI had sent her to England in 1846 to found a congregation of Nuns who should devote themselves to Catholic education. After various difficulties, which will not be considered here, the Order began to flourish, and by the time Emily entered the Convent at St. Leonard's there were ten Convents of the Society in England and America. Emily admired the Foundress, who was still alive, and wrote a poem about her in which the following verse occurs:

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Her hands were joined, and in the deep
Of those mysterious eyes
I saw the love and power sleep
Which from much prayer arise.

Emily started her period of novitiate eager and enthusiastic. At first this new life was difficult for her. As her biographer comments :

She had always displayed a certain independence of character. In her mode of attack in the spiritual life she continued to do so. Her dangers in the past had sprung from pride and wilfulness and from her strong affections. It was these things that she now determined to conquer. . . . Therefore to the subdual of her own nature she now applied herself with relentless energy.

At first, she was made to wash up the dishes in the children's refectory. She hated this at the beginning, but with her growing love of mortification she came to love the unpleasant duty. With an ecstatic desire of self-crucifixion, she grew more and more ascetic about her food, and would frequently keep the crusts of bread left over at meal-time and eat them as her only meal at refection.

Even before her novitiate, she had preferred to sleep on a hard bed. A contemplative by nature, she now spent all her spare time in prayer. As the time drew near for the ceremony of the Clothing with the Religious Habit, 'Emily seemed to spend every moment before the Blessed Sacrament.' 'During the meditations she knelt all the time.' Moreover, she was very anxious that her bridal dress, in which she was to be received into the Church as a Bride of Christ, should be as perfect as possible, and that the orange blossoms should be fresh and fragrant.

On the day of her reception, her family came to see her, and she and her father took a last walk together through the gardens. After this first ceremony, one of several that precede the final taking of the veil, Emily was moved to Mayfield, where the old palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury had been restored as a Convent through the beneficence of the Duchess of Leeds.

The first two years of her novitiate passed quickly. On April 5th, 1875, she returned to St. Leonard's for her profession of

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temporary vows. Emily's biographer, writing about this important event in her life as a nun, says :

The ceremony prescribed for this occasion is most imposing, and must have made a deep impression upon Sister Mary Christina, with her poetic imagination and deep sense of the supernatural. While the Litany of the Saints is being sung a funeral pall is spread over the prostrated novices to show that those who are to be received as spouses of Christ must be dead to this world. Holy Mass follows, and immediately before each novice receives Holy Communion she pronounces her vows aloud. After the Mass, the wonderful symbolic ceremony of the espousals with Christ is celebrated.

This is the occasion when the Bishop places a ring on the finger of the novice and weds her to Christ. On the evening of this day, Emily prayed that 'she might run a long course in a short time'. Her wish was to be granted all too soon.

Meanwhile father and daughter still maintained an active correspondence. He sends her the manuscript of his *Odes*—he is anxious for her criticism.

She writes back:

April 11, 1875.

At last Sunday is come, and I can write about your *Ode* which Mama so kindly copied out. It would be an impertinence for me to praise it, but I can say that it gave me very great pleasure, and new pleasure every time I read it. To say nothing of the general sense in which I flatter myself I quite understand you, you imagine how under the circumstances, these lines went to my heart.

'The daisied path of Poverty'
and
'The brightest third of the dead Virtues three'.

I hope Dr. Newman has read it. When shall I have the other? I wish you had brought the critique. Ever since I read the *Ode* and imagined all the rest you have been writing, I have been indulging in a sort of ecstasy of pride at being your daughter, a very innocent sort of pride I hope! (You see, I am so gushing because Nuns have no hearts!)

As for myself, dear Papa, I will not say anything about it; some things are too good to be spoken of; but you must thank

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God for me, and yourself for letting me be a Nun. I know many people do not think we are Nuns at all, but that is so much the better, if Our Lord thinks we are so. I had no time to think of anything the day you were all there, but of course, since then, everything has gone on with the usual delightful monotony, which I know you envy.

How beautiful Bertha's paintings are: she does *very* much better than I ever saw her do before; and she seems to think very little of them. Please will you remember to give Tenny my love and thanks for his note?

You made me so happy by what you said when we were first coming out of the Church the other day. I often repeat it to myself.

The last line refers to what her father had told her of the joy her consecration to God had brought him.

Coventry Patmore was beginning at this time to meditate the composition of a great poem on the Marriage of the Virgin Mary, and he frequently asked for his daughter's advice. Undoubtedly, the thought that his favourite child had given herself to God influenced his mind towards a deeper contemplation of mystical and religious subjects, and helped him in the writing of many of his poems.

In 1877 he sends her the complete series of Odes, to be published under the title of *The Unknown Eros*, and she answers:

April 14.

You must be expecting to hear about the Odes before now. If I say anything foolish you must remember I am one of the 'hare-brained brood' you mention. In the first place, St. Peter says of St. Paul's Epistles that 'there are in them certain things hard to be understood, which many unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own damnation.' I think that might be said of the 'Odes', *Remembered grace* for instance; but anyone who would offend God on such a consideration could never have really known and loved Him. Of course you know about the theology of it better than I do. That last part, from 'the last new "Oracle"' how true it is. Some lines have more truth than can be said, as 'Many speak wisely' etc. As the beautiful poem says, these (compared to the *Angel*) are 'like a thrush's song' (compared to a lark's). *Eros* is exquisite: it is enough to say that I know what you mean: I like this

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line very much 'It is a Spirit, though it seems red gold'; but, for poetical beauty apart from the purely spiritual, the beginning to 'whither they depart' is wonderful and delicious. *Let Be* of course you know is most profound, but let me say so too. 'Another is mistook through his deceitful likeness to his look' is one of those pieces of wisdom that see round the corner, like a looking-glass. What a comfort it is to think that God really knows everyone; for we know very little of each other, I am more and more convinced. *Legem tuam dilexi* is delightful to me, and I do not know how people can object to it while God, of whom we name so many attributes, is defined to be 'A simple Act' by the Xtian doctrine books. *The Toys* is very, very touching, I like it very much. *Magna est Veritas* is delightful, and ends with a touch of something too deep to be called satire. It seems to me quite true about the ingenious blaspheming, though I am afraid the last word is all the credit they often get. I knew the first IX Odes by heart before, and they very often 'say themselves to me', whether I like it or not; it is like a tune that will finish itself if you begin it, because each note is the natural consequence of the former. Of course the *Deliciae* etc., is too beautiful to praise. I think the Odes are very like Holy Scripture in being so simple that anyone might imagine they understood all there is, and so profound that few will really do so. They are also like Scripture in the way Shakespeare is, viz. in being intensely human, and in not saying the words allowed to express the thing, but the *thing* itself. It is very painful to think how most people will prefer such verse as . . . 's but that kind of sorrow we have to feel for everything really good. There are two lines in one Ode that I could wish were not there. If I have said anything presumptuous, please forgive it. With much love and many thanks,

Your loving child,

S. Mary Christina,
S.H.C.J.

This is the last letter from his daughter that Patmore kept. Probably as he lived so near the Convent and saw her frequently they did not need to write to each other any more.

Suddenly, in April of 1880, the second Mrs. Patmore died, and her husband decided to build a church at Hastings to commemorate her. Emily took an intense interest in the project.

The plans were entrusted to a great friend, Basil Champ-

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neys, later Patmore's official biographer, and by 1883 the church of St. Mary Star of the Sea was completed. To-day it still stands just below the Old Mansion House, a perpetual memorial to the poet and his family. It is an eloquent argument of Patmore's good taste and knowledge of architecture, for the interior has a beauty and a charm which were uncommon in the period in which it was conceived and built.

As the spiritual qualities in Emily increased, her health began to fail. It is said that she received a revelation of God. All her fellow Nuns believed this to be true, and even the children who were being taught at the Convent used to say 'Sister Mary Christina has seen Our Lord'.

In July, 1880, her Superiors became alarmed about her. They noticed with anxiety her increasing paleness, alternating with a hectic flush. There is no doubt that she had inherited her mother's delicate health, and now the austerities and self-inflicted privations of her convent life had seriously weakened her strength. She was sent away to Mayfield for rest and change of air.

In the September of this year she returned to St. Leonard's greatly improved in health. By now, she was wrapped deep in contemplation. To her, Prayer became the supreme joy of life. Her fellow Nuns at the Convent remember her at this time and recall

how there was one place in which she particularly loved to pray. Opening from the Infirmary into the Chapel at St. Leonard's is a tiny raised gallery intended for use of those who are well enough to assist at Mass in the Chapel below. There one can see the Tabernacle and pray all unseen. A sister remembers one evening meeting Sister Mary Christina with radiant face, stumbling out of this hiding-place, intoxicated, as it were, with love. She was embarrassed at the meeting and could only stammer a few words implying that she must have been asleep. It was no natural sleep. Some of the sisters had discovered her retreat, and they used to come silently and kneel there to watch her, as they believed, in ecstasy. Sometimes a beautiful smile would irradiate her face, sometimes a look of inexpressible sorrow. It was these glimpses of God that gave her strength to live her life of otherwise uninterrupted labour and penance.

In the Autumn of 1881 she began to grow weaker again.

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But she would not give up her daily work. A slight chill precipitated her illness, and soon it became evident that, like her mother, she was dying of consumption. She was only twenty-eight. By April, 1882, she was so ill that she was confined to her room. Once again, her father was destined to watch the being he loved best die slowly before his eyes. Memories of his first wife must have come back to him—sad, tormenting memories that he has enshrined in the Odes *Departure* and *A Farewell*. Emily was glad to die. When one of the Sisters spoke to her of recovery, she said quickly, ‘No, no! I am going to die.’ It is recorded that ‘the joy she felt at the thought of death was quite ecstatic, and her one desire was for Holy Communion, which was brought to her daily.’

As the days went by ‘the Nuns would come and ask her prayers, and the children of the Convent constantly sent flowers for the little altar.’

Like Saint Teresa in Crashaw’s lovely Ode, she yearned for her earthly release. In the words of the poem, her soul cried out:

How kindly will thy gentle heart
Kiss the sweetly-killing dart!
And close in his embraces keep
Those delicious wounds, that weep
Balsam, to heal themselves thus,
When these thy deaths, so numerous
Shall all at last die into one,
And melt thy soul’s sweet mansion;
Like a soft lump of incense, hasted
By too hot a fire, and wasted
Into perfuming clouds, so fast
Shalt thou exhale to heav’n at last
In a resolving sigh . . .

In these last days, the young nun experienced all the agonies of mystical understanding. As her biographer writes:

All at once her consolations ceased, and a terrible cloud of darkness and depression descended on her spirit. She felt she was forsaken by God, and could neither pray nor love. . . . Fears for the future, dread of the past, beset her agonizing soul. Everything was a torment to her. Especially she was haunted by

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a conviction that she had loved her father too much, and had been too proud of him.

It was a dark hour, too, for him. When he found that his visits caused her such distress, he went away bewildered and sad. She was terrified lest her love for him had separated her from God, and she begged him not to visit her again. She also refused to see any other members of her family. During these hours her sufferings were terrible. 'Never,' said one of those who saw much of her during these days, 'never did I see anything that gave me so vivid an idea of the pain which the souls in purgatory endure separated from their God.' In agony her soul cried out, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'

Then, one day, peace returned to her, 'It was suggested that she should send for her father to console him for all he had suffered on her account.' He came. They were together again, and 'the one cloud of their long intercourse had passed away'. She gave him her crucifix—her only earthly treasure.

On Thursday, June 13th, Emily told the Nuns that she would not live till night. In the morning she asked for her father. He came up, but she seemed so much better, that, in spite of her premonition, he did not believe she would die that day. After a short visit he left her saying that he would return on the morrow. At half-past five on the same day, the Chaplain, Father William Hogan, came to see her, and heard her confession. Suddenly at about six o'clock she raised herself on her pillows, and her look became transfigured. The sister who was nursing her said that for several days she had noticed that fixed look at intervals, and thought that something supernatural was happening. Now there was no doubt possible. Her face became transfigured and shone with a light like the reflection of a brilliant sun. She exclaimed: 'He is coming! He is coming! I see Him! Oh, my sweet Jesus! And my Mother Mary too! How beautiful you are!' Then followed repeated exclamations as if out of herself with joy. After which she said imploringly: 'Oh, do let them all see you, that they may know what you are! Let them see your beauty.' Then entreatingly—'Take me now . . . do not wait . . . do not disappoint me.'

After this there was a silence during which she appeared to

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be listening to Our Lord, for the space of two or three minutes. It seemed as if He must be reminding her of all she had done and suffered for Him, for she cried aloud, 'Oh, it was so little!' It was nothing at all. I would willingly undergo a thousand times as much for you, my Lord.' Then, 'Take me with you, for I cannot live without you.' Then followed a longer silence.

Meanwhile, a sister went to call the priest. 'She wants prayers, Father, and it is your place to say them. Our Lord is with her.' Father Hogan went immediately to the infirmary. But when he drew near and saw her face, he said, 'She wants no prayers of mine. I could not interrupt her converse with God.' He knelt down by the door and prayed in silence, keeping his eyes fixed on her.

At last, Sister Mary Christina spoke again, but this time quite calmly, 'Yes, dear Lord, I will persevere. I will suffer as long as you wish to please you.' Then as if awakening, she turned to the Infirmarian, with an expression of perfect resignation, and said, 'It is not His sweet will to take me now. I must wait two hours.' . . . Her face became pale again, and the supernatural light which had irradiated it faded away.

Most of the community had by now assembled round the dying sister, and the Superior, recognising the last change, sent to summon Coventry Patmore. The messenger met him at the gate. He had felt irresistibly impelled to walk towards the Convent, though without any intention of returning to the sickroom that day. He was just in time. It was now nearly eight o'clock, and she had said that she must wait two hours. The prayers for the departing soul had already begun when her father arrived. He knelt close beside her couch and answered all the prayers in a steady voice. She lay quiet and patient, her eyes still fixed on the sky to the east . . .

Eight o'clock struck. There was a moment's struggle for breath. She called out to the Infirmarian, 'What shall I do, Sister?' The Sister moistened her lips—'You are doing beautifully. It will soon be over. Go on with the aspirations, and keep fast hold of Our Lord!' Then the prayers continued, and she answered them herself.

At last she said, 'Oh, I am so happy. Now let me die,' and without a sigh or movement gave up her soul to God. Her father kissed her forehead and closed her eyes.

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For a few minutes more he knelt and prayed in the silent room, over which brooded the peace of God. Then he rose and walked slowly homeward, silent and bowed beneath the darkening sky.

Emily was buried in the grounds of the Convent, where her grave can still be seen.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Third Marriage

DEATH hovered threateningly over Coventry Patmore's household during the beginning of his life at Hastings. Mary Patmore died suddenly during the April of 1880. An invalid, she had been gradually receding into the background of her husband's life, and now she faded rather pathetically out of the picture.

There is no doubt that during the last few years a 'fair stranger' had begun to take her place in her husband's affections. Once installed as the governess, Harriet Robson had soon found her way into the lonely heart of the poet. Her affection for his daughter Emily had been a great bond, and her lively interest in his poetry had been another. Mary Patmore for all her goodness and knowledge of Catholic doctrine had never really understood the later Odes, but the pretty, younger woman displayed a flattering interest in his work. Even in the Heron's Ghyll days, he had got into the habit of writing to Harriet when he was away, and he had come to rely on her judgment about the management of the children and in matters concerning his work. His Muse had always demanded the company and sympathetic understanding of an attractive woman.

A year after Mary Patmore's death, allowing a decent interval for the conventions, Coventry Patmore contracted his third marriage. For on September 13th, 1881, he married Miss Harriet Georgina Robson at the Pro-Cathedral, Kensington. Patmore was obviously sensitive to any criticism of this new marriage, for he wrote to his old friend, Lord Houghton:

Hastings. September 30th, 1881.

My dear Lord Houghton,

My wife is a Catholic lady who was for ten years governess to my daughters. So that I have had good means of ascertaining her fitness for me and for them. They are devotedly attached to

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her, and have welcomed her to her new position with enthusiasm. My living so entirely out of the world has made a reconstruction of home a necessity for me and for them—but I need no excuse to you; for your kind note proves by its geniality that you are one of the very few who can discern the seemingly obvious fact that a man probably knows his own business best in matters which concern him infinitely more than they concern anyone else.

Believe me,

My dear Lord Houghton,

Yours very truly,

C. Patmore.

In justice to Harriet Patmore, it must be recorded that she made the poet very happy. High-spirited, witty and intelligent, she yet made herself into a model wife of a famous man. She collected his papers and compelled him to write down his memories of his contemporaries, and she did her best to guard his fame when he was dead. I remember visiting her during the last years of her life at Lymington. She was like a Rembrandt portrait of an old lady—still beautiful, with a charming fresh complexion and pure white hair. She sat upright in a high-backed carved oak chair and graciously gave me her hand to kiss. But there was a hardness underneath the well-staged charm. This woman had triumphed, but she had paid the price for supplanting another. As Mrs. Coventry Patmore she had inherited all his money, possessions and fame, but in the last years of the poet's life she had known but never admitted that he loved another woman.

As often happens with ageing men, this new marriage brought fresh life to Coventry Patmore. The sorrows of the past were forgotten in the joy that he felt when, in his sixty-first year, his young wife presented him with a son. This child, Francis Epiphanius—consequently called 'Piffie'—became his chief pre-occupation: so much so, that he could write a few years later: 'It is wonderful how much dearer he is to me than any other baby ever was. The one apparently intolerable trial would be to lose him.'

Harriet Patmore was welcomed by the younger members of Coventry Patmore's family under the nickname of 'Obby', and both Bertha and Gertrude liked her; Emily, who was still alive



HARRIET ROBSON, the third Mrs. Coventry Patmore

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at the time of the marriage, wrote to her just before the ceremony:

My dear Obby,

I do not know whether I may still call you so. May I? Papa came the other day to tell me what I knew long ago, as I know many a thing I am not told. I am very glad they will all be happy now, for you know and love them all, and will be truly a mother to them. I have been praying long on the subject, and I hope it is God's own arrangement for you and them . . . You know I cannot talk grandly, but what I say I really mean. . . .

Now good-bye till I address my letter differently. I will pray hard these few days, and invoke for you such saints as the 'dear St. Elizabeth' and St. Louis of France, who were so perfect in matrimony.

The elder sons, Milnes and Tennyson, were not so cordial, but they had drifted away from the family roof. Both had married and settled down into lives of their own. My grandfather, Tennyson Patmore, always spoke proudly and affectionately of his father, but Milnes, the sailor, openly disliked him. Coventry was baffled by his eldest son's hatred. He tried hard to placate him, and among other services gave him money towards buying a merchant-service vessel of his own; but it was in vain. Sad and puzzled he wrote to Harriet:

Milnes is gone to Scotland to settle about the ship. I fancy he is pretty sure to get it, and I hope the fulfilment of his wish will do him good. But young men are queer creatures, and are more apt to think of what further they imagine might be done for them, than to be grateful for what they get. A very good discipline for fathers!

One of the tragedies of Coventry Patmore's life was that although he possessed an immense capacity for love, he did not always show it. He took an intense interest in his children and his new friends, and his moments of brusqueness or imperiousness were always followed by sessions of remorse.

His third marriage, however, heralded a distinctly happy era of his life. Just before it, his poetical career seemed finished. The music of *The Unknown Eros* had fallen on deaf ears, and in 1881, as Gosse writes, 'the very name of Patmore was still

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ridiculous. *The Unknown Eros* was absolutely ignored. *The Angel in the House*, after its great, rustic success, was wholly rejected by those who were the tyrants of criticism.' Now, through the influence of new and important friends, this tide of aspersion was to turn into praise. Pre-eminent among these new supporters were Sir Edmund Gosse, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Alice Meynell.

Gosse first met Patmore at the Savile Club in 1879. 'It was in company with several other and younger men, and he made a highly disagreeable impression on me,' writes Gosse. 'I thought him harsh and sardonic, he said little, and what he said was bitter.' Nevertheless, the two men of letters corresponded on the structure and function of the Ode, and in 1881, Gosse was invited down to Hastings for a Sunday visit. This time the meeting was a great success, and the beginning of a friendship that lasted until Patmore's death.

Gosse, then a rising critic, was admirably suited as a companion for Patmore. His own childhood, so admirably related in his book *Father and Son*, had taught him to understand the mystical and religious strain that formed so definite a part of Coventry Patmore's character. His passionate love for literature, his eager sympathetic character, and his influence in the literary world, undoubtedly did much to help and encourage the neglected poet during this dark and critical period of his life.

Gosse excelled in painting portraits of his illustrious contemporaries, and his description of his first visit to Hastings is so vivid and life-like that I cannot do better than quote it:

My first Sunday at Hastings was spent mainly at his study fire. I see him now, stretched in his familiar seated attitude, his hands clasped, his arms extended along his legs, the whole body attenuated and immobile, only the marvellous head moving sharply and frequently, almost as if on a pivot, the eyes darkening and twinkling, the Protean lips reflecting in their curves every shade of feeling that passed over the poet's mind. Out of this attitude, he would move only to pounce, with extraordinary suddenness, on one of the cigarettes which lay strewn about, like leaves in Vallombrosa, lighting it and then resuming his shrouded and pinioned pose. And so sitting, sloped to the fire, he would talk for hours of the highest things, of thoughts

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and passions above a mortal guise, descending every now and then in some fierce eccentric jest, always to be punctuated by a loud, crackling laugh, ending in a dry cough.

He also recalls :

At this time, and long afterwards, Patmore indulged in a passion for nocturnal walks. Somnolent and sluggish in the afternoon, his pulse would begin to beat as the night came on, and would rise into an excitement which nothing but a long, wild stroll in the darkness would allay. On the occasion of my first visit, I recollect that I was summoned to accompany him. We sallied forth into the gloom of the faintly twinkling town, and descended swiftly to the sea-wall. The night was fine, with buffeting wind, the remnant of a great storm; the tide was high, and it was difficult to pass along the Parade without being drenched by the fountains of spray which rose, mysterious and phantasmal, out of the resounding darkness. My companion was in ecstasy; he marched forward with his head in the air, his loose, grey curls tossing in the breeze, his coat blown wildly away from his thin figure. He seemed, to my fancy, to be the enchanter whose magic had raised all this turmoil of the elements, and to be empowered, at will, to quiet it all in a moment.

Gosse then goes on to say :

This was the first of unnumbered pilgrimages to which I shall always look back as among the most tonic experiences of my social life . . . To listen to Patmore in those days, days of his spiritual ecstasy, was to assist to a solemn, mounting music. From having lived so much alone, from having escaped all the friction of the mind which comes from indiscriminate intercourse, his speech and thought had preserved, with a certain savage oddity, a singular freshness, a wild flavour of the berry. In talking to him, one escaped from all the worn conventions of conversation; instead of rubbed and greasy coppers, one received fresh-minted gold.

Back in London, Gosse set about interesting people in Patmore's work with all his customary eagerness and enthusiasm. He persuaded Patmore to return to writing prose—an exercise he had given up since his early married days. Mary Patmore had begun a translation of St. Bernard on *The Love of God*, which

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Patmore had completed after her death, and Gosse now persuaded Kegan Paul to publish it. He also encouraged him during the composition of the famous lost treatise called *Sponsa Dei*.

Patmore, about this time, suffered a last and final bereavement. In February 1883, Henry, the youngest son of his first marriage, died. He was only twenty-three and, like his sister Emily, was steeped in the psychological mysteries of his father's conversation; like her also he showed distinct poetical ability. Coventry Patmore wrote of Henry Patmore in the introduction to his privately-printed poems:

Once, when I had been commending his verses, he laughed, and said that I should perhaps be known in future time as 'The Father of Patmore'. Had he lived, his jest would probably have become prophecy.

Gosse showed himself a sympathetic friend in this sorrow. He helped Patmore to arrange for a privately-printed edition of Henry's poems, which was beautifully produced by the Daniel Press at Oxford in 1884; and he also wrote a short memorial poem for inclusion in the volume.

At the beginning of this year he wrote to Patmore:

I come back, as I always do from a visit to you, strongly moved and quickened in spirit, dazzled with glimpses of a stronger light than common day. I have already written to Oxford about the printing of Henry's poems, and shall let you know as soon as I have an answer.

As I lay awake last night thinking of what you had told me about Henry, and what I had read of his writings, I composed some verses which I venture to send you . . .

The verses were received with delight by Patmore, who comforted himself for his son's death with the thought: 'I feel prouder and gladder of his innocent and dutiful life than if he had been the greatest poet of the age.'

Henry's poems also brought him a remarkable letter from another important new friend, Gerard Manley Hopkins, whom he had met for the first time on a short visit to Stonyhurst in the summer of 1883. A few months later he had written

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to Robert Bridges: 'I have seldom felt so much attracted towards any man as I have been towards him.'

Hopkins wrote to him from Stonyhurst on November 23rd, 1883:

In your son Henry you have lost a mind not only of wonderful promise, but even of wonderful achievement. In the poems you have kindly lent me, there may indeed be found some few immaturities, many expressions the echo of yours, and one or two perhaps of those of other poets, and the thought, both in its spontaneous play and also from the channel of reading and education it had of course run in, such as well to mark the writer for his father's son; still the general effect of their perusal is astonishment at a mind so mature, so masculine, so fresh, and so fastidiously independent; *sed erat*, as the Breviary says of St. Agnes, *senectus mentis immensa*. It is no disparagement to see in this (what I have seen in a remarkable degree in a young child) the unnatural maturity of consumption and the clear-sightedness of approaching death, forestalling by the refinement of the body what would otherwise have come with years.

What first strikes in the poems is the spontaneous thoughtfulness, the utter freedom from the poetical cant of this age, and all that wilderness of words in which one is lost in every copy of magazine verses one comes across. Your example was however here a natural safeguard. The love of paradox, carried even to perversity, is due also to his birth or his breeding. The disdainful avoidance of affectation and vulgar effect leads sometimes to the ineffective, as in the last couplet of the line 'O for that afternoon': he would have come to feel this. To me the three most beautiful pieces seem to be the Sunset-poem, the lines on Flora's violin, and the Prologue

But if the poems have a shortcoming beyond points of detail, it would be in flow, in the poetical impetus, and also in richness of diction: they are strong where this age is weak—I mean Swinburne and the popular poets, and I may say, Tennyson himself—in thought and insight, but they are weak where the age is strong. He might have strengthened in this respect with growth, or have compensated for the want by weight and mastery of thought; but I have an impression that, had he lived, he would have laid his chief stress elsewhere than in poetry. Naturally, being who he was, to write poetry came to him first—his mind had been cradled in it; and even the metres he employs are those he was familiar with in you. But

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it seems to me, though it may look strained that nowhere in these poems is there such a stroke of genius as the title of the piece on sunset. I should say he had, and would have found himself to have, a command of prose style by which he could have achieved more even than by that of poetry. The finest prose style is, in English, at least, rarer, I should say, than the finest poetical . . .

This short poem by Henry Patmore will give some idea of his quality:

Prologue

To poems mostly unwritten

Th' immortal mood was with me then,
That comes but once to mortal men,
The visiting God, whose throned place
Is still some maid's unconscious face,
Or blushing, while she wonders why
A man should make a maiden shy.
And him, too much in love to dare
To think he loves her, standing there,
Sharp pain drives thence and angel awe;
And then he sees what there he saw.
For many a man, should this be read,
Will call it his, when I am dead,
And all my words would seem to come
As echoes from his memory dumb.
The care of crooked-counselled time
Returns to love, as verse to rhyme;
And circumstance, which lovers fear,
Is but the dress love deigns to wear,
Which changes variously, and still
Conforms to love, which forms the will.

The next few years witnessed a decided revival of public interest in Coventry Patmore's work, and in 1886, Gosse, by means of three important articles on Patmore's work in *The Athenaeum*, *St. James's Gazette*, and *The Saturday Review* did much to encourage this tendency.

Patmore was delighted with Gosse's reviews which, although they exhibited the weaknesses of *The Angel in the House*, praised *The Unknown Eros* very highly. Speaking of the *Angel*, Gosse had written:

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This laureate of the tea-table, with his humdrum stories of girls that smell of bread and butter, is in his utmost heart the most arrogant and visionary mystic.

Referring to these reviews, Patmore wrote to Gosse:

Hastings, June 21, 1886.

My dear Gosse,

Your 'clawing' in the 'Saturday' duly received. At first I received an agreeable titillation: I felt inclined to squall as your endearments acquired a certain feline ferocity, and tore out with your *talents* tufts of bloody hair—seemly enough in their place—and displayed them to a discerning public as specimens of my fur; but I ended by purring, when I came to *The Departure* and assured myself that, although the Saturday readers would look upon *D.V.* and *Widow Neale* as my *average*, still they would see that in one or two happy moments I could rise above it. Seriously however I thank you very much, and long for the opportunity of *stroking* you, in my more mildly amatory fashion, in return.

Gosse evidently felt that Patmore might be hurt by some of his criticisms, for a month later Patmore wrote to him again, reassuringly:

My dear Gosse,

I wrote yesterday before getting your note. You need not dread our indignation. We were greatly pleased with the praise, and no less amused by the blame. You should have heard the inextinguishable laughter with which your descriptions of *Honoria* and *Amelia* as girls 'smelling of bread and butter' were received. My wife suggests that, in the next edition, the name of *Honoria* should be changed to *Butterina*. Your criticism almost tempts me to break my resolution to write no more, in order to show the world that, if I choose, I can depict a melancholy whore after the most approved contemporary type.

For some time Patmore wished Gosse to be his literary executor, and in this capacity Gosse witnessed the writing and the destruction of Patmore's lost prose work *Sponsa Dei*, about which I shall write in a subsequent chapter. It was later decided that it would be more suitable if Patmore's executor were

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a Catholic, and Gosse was released from the task. However, his *Life of Coventry Patmore* became, and remained for many years, the standard critical work on its subject. This book, while it contains many brilliant passages, shows an astonishing bias. It is too highly coloured with the extravagances of Coventry Patmore's character, and the more human side of his nature is ignored. As Sir Shane Leslie points out:

There is difficulty in catching the essence of so quaint and finical a being as Coventry Patmore. He escapes sprite-like from the ponderous Biography in which Champneys tried to bottle him. Gosse's conscientious study lacked sympathy with his supernaturalism. He mistook Patmore's *Arbor Vite*, a wonderful vision of the Church of Rome, for a political creed . . .

A man of contradictions, Patmore was yet intensely human in both his failings and his strengths. His treatment of Mrs. Procter, now a very old lady, about this period, is a typical example of his extreme tact and fundamentally sympathetic nature. Years before she had managed to interest Lord Houghton in the desperate case of Coventry Patmore when he was a struggling young poet of twenty-two. The Procters had also helped the young married couple through the financial difficulties of his wife, Emily Patmore's, illness. In 1874 B. W. Procter, or Barry Cornwall as he was known, died and Patmore with great delicacy offered to help his widow. Overcome with gratitude the charming old lady replies:

My dear Kind Friend,

I feel great difficulty in answering your letter—because not holding the Poet's pen, I cannot express to you how deeply I feel your delicate kindness—your summing up the very small services I did you—the gift of the hundred pounds, of which I knew nothing until to-day—all this, to make me easy and happy to take from your willing hand. I sold the books—my dear husband wished me to do so and in the small house, or lodging, I and Edith shall share, the books would have been sadly in the way. I have kept all we cared for, amongst them one bound in Blue Velvet that you gave me.

Your letter is so charming that I long to publish it. We are not rich, but we have enough. Should I want help I shall come

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to you, and in doing so I shall, I know, gratify you. I both cried and laughed at your letter when you say 'I dread I shall never hear from you again'.

Your grateful old friend,

Anne B. Procter.

Mrs. Procter asked him to write a biography of Barry Cornwall. To please her he wrote the book, because, as he told Gosse: 'I could not refuse, though it was a task little suited to me. I was never really intimate with Procter, though I had known him for many years: and though I admired his simple, sincere and reticent character, I cared little for his poetry.' However, he undertook the work, and in 1877 the book appeared under the title *Bryan Waller Procter*. Extremely fragmentary, consisting of a short memoir, an autobiographical sketch, and some letters, it is only interesting as Patmore's earliest printed work in prose.

In 1885 the old lady died, and Patmore wrote to his neighbour, Dykes Campbell: 'I expected your news of course. I did not know that Mrs. Procter's age was so great. She was, in that and more important ways, the most remarkable woman I have ever known.'

The years were slipping by. He, too, was getting old. As Gosse notes: 'After 1880, he rather suddenly became an elderly man, having preserved his youth for an unusually long time. He lived sixteen years more, but these were years of withdrawal and meditation . . . He chats, he writes a letter, he accedes to the claims of society, but he is listening all the time for the sound of the chariot-wheels.'

CHAPTER TWENTY

The Meeting of Two Poets

HE had borne himself with a 'singular dignity during the years of neglect. Now the praise and admiration of a younger generation of writers and critics such as Francis Thompson, Alice Meynell, Robert Bridges, and Father Gerard Manley Hopkins were to fill his years with a calm delight. It was worth all the years of loneliness to receive the discerning recognition these new friendships gave him.

The meetings between Coventry Patmore and Hopkins were sparse. They met only twice during the six years of their friendship; but these meetings between two of the most remarkable intellects of the time must have been an exciting experience for both poets, and they brought about a voluminous correspondence.*

Coventry Patmore met Gerard Manley Hopkins for the first time when he paid a visit to the Jesuit School at Stonyhurst during the summer of 1883. Describing this visit, Hopkins wrote to his friend, yet another poet, Richard Watson Dixon, on the 12th August of that year:

Coventry Patmore came to visit us and stayed three or four days. The Rector gave me charge of him, and I saw a good deal of him, and had a good deal of talk. He knew and expressed great admiration of Bridges' Muse upon the strength of extracts in reviews only, not having till that time been able to get the poem from his bookseller. He told me that he was very slow in taking in a new poet, even the meaning, much more the effect and spirit; he said, 'I feel myself in the presence of a new mind, a new spirit, but beyond that at a first reading, I am not yet accustomed to the strange atmosphere . . . '

*The Oxford University Press published *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins* including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore, edited by Claude Collier Abbott. 1938.

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His conversation was of course full of interest. He is fastidious and searching in his criticism.

We know that Hopkins already admired Patmore's work, for several years before he had written to Dixon, in the June of 1878:

Mr. Coventry Patmore, whose fame again is very deeply below his great merit, seems to have said something very finely about the loss of fame in his lately published *Odes*.

The brief visit to Stonyhurst was to have a profound effect on Coventry Patmore's work, and for the next few years Hopkins was to exercise an influence over him that is all the more remarkable because of the difference between the ages of the two men. Coventry Patmore, despite the temporary eclipse of his popularity, was a famous man, known as the friend and contemporary of men of such eminence as Tennyson, Carlyle, Browning and Rossetti, whilst Hopkins was an unknown Jesuit priest, yet the older poet eagerly welcomed Hopkins's advice and criticism. And when Hopkins died six years later, Patmore could write to Robert Bridges :

I can well understand how terrible a loss you have suffered in the death of Gerard Hopkins—you saw so much more of him than I did. I spent three days with him in Stonyhurst, and he stayed here [at Hastings] and that, with the exception of a somewhat abundant correspondence by letter, is all the communication I had with him, but this was enough to awaken in me a reverence and affection, the like of which I have never felt for any other man but one, that one being Frederick Greenwood, who for more than a quarter of a century has been the sole true and heroic politician and journalist in our degraded land. Gerard Hopkins was the only orthodox, and as far as I could see, saintly man in whom religion had absolutely no narrowing effect upon his general opinions and sympathies.

A Catholic of the most scrupulous strictness, he could nevertheless see the Holy Spirit in all goodness, truth and beauty; and there was something in all his words and manners which was at once a rebuke and an attraction to all who could aspire to be like him. . . .

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Father Lahey, discussing Hopkins's influence over Patmore, wrote in his *Life of Hopkins*:

The place that Gerard Hopkins holds in the economy of the spiritual and poetic life of Coventry Patmore is one of great importance. This throws a new light on their characters, and when we consider the wide circle of Patmore's friends supremely eminent in literature, politics and religion, as well as the fact that Patmore and Hopkins met but twice during their short friendship of six years, it betrays a greatness in Hopkins' character which might otherwise lie hidden.

It was Hopkins who had brought Robert Bridges to the notice of Coventry Patmore. The two men had exchanged volumes of verse, and a friendship founded on mutual admiration had soon sprung up between them. Discussing Bridges with Hopkins, Patmore wrote to the latter on August 18th, 1884:

I am much interested in Bridges both personally and as a Poet. As a Poet he surprises me by his power of pouring forth, almost without any pauses for correction, thousands of verses all bearing the appearance of high finish. His first draft of 'Eros and Psyche' is more complete than I could have made such a Poem after years of correction . . .

Personally, I am attracted to him, as I am to all really poetic minds, by—may I call it so?—a sort of sanctity of intellect, a power of perceiving an immense range of things rightly and of believing his perceptions, because they are perceptions.

And Bridges could write to Patmore, after many years of friendship, on returning from a visit to the Patmores:

After I got home I took down *The Unknown Eros* and read about half it again, and I wondered again, since you can write such poetry as there is in the best of these Odes, how could you interest yourself in my humble performances. Certainly your great power makes your praise of my work the best thing which I ever had, or am likely to have in that kind . . .

It was also Bridges who arranged for Patmore to have a copy of Hopkins's verses which were still unknown and unpublished.

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Preparing Patmore for these poems, Bridges wrote on December 15th, 1883:

I should tell you that Gerard Hopkins is affected in style. His affectation is somewhat natural to him, however, and subservient to general effect . . . I think of him as of Dixon that he must always be treasured by poetic minds on account of his original beauties. I hope you will think so—I feel foolish in writing confidential wisdom concerning my betters.

As for the prosody, which should be the interest of this letter, H pushes it to its extreme limits. If there is an ad absurdum of it he exhibits it. He has (for instance) in my opinion, an absolutely wrong notion of rhyme. He does not consider that it makes necessarily any pause in the rhythm. This would affect his rhythm to my ears unfavourably *in whatever prosody he wrote*, and you will exclude the effect produced by it from the proper effect of the prosody. Then you will see that he is naturally bent towards subtlety of rhythm as well as of expression, and you will have another allowance to make there, and judge, where the prosody seems unintelligible at first reading (if it should seem so) that he is playing some trick on it.—His music, for he has written some airs, would give an excellent example of the way in which he loves to elaborate the simplest forms.

The result of all these qualities is a 'product' which is unique. I do not suppose that there is anything like him in the world. Tho' there is much in his poems which I should not defend as *useful prosody*, yet you will find plenty of passages where the full force of the system, his originally, which I advocate, is well shown.

The interest that both Hopkins and Bridges took in technique and the grammar of English verse is well known, but it is less known that they both hoped to gain Patmore as a collaborator in their projected treatise on what Bridges called 'the new prosody'. Writing from Yattendon on September 28th, 1883, Bridges says to Patmore:

The interest which you take in the grammar of English verse has led me to hope that you would not be disinclined to give an account in print of what Hopkins and I call the new prosody. We both regard it—without prejudice to the conventional prosody, which you will have seen I use independently of it—as the true solution of English rhythm. Perhaps we write it rather

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differently; I should say Hopkins most correctly, I more popularly or practically—but I think that we both want an outsider to say something. Your learned essay gives you a standpoint, and anything which you say must have a definite meaning: and your judgment would be at once unprejudiced and weighty. Then I think that—supposing the ‘new prosody’ to be worth your attention—that the completeness of what you have hitherto written rather demands that you should treat this theory.

If you feel at all inclined to do this I should be most happy to correspond with you on the subject, or in the interests of the subject I would come down to Hastings and hold sessions with you.

I shall never write on prosody myself. I think it likely that Hopkins might do so, but I am very anxious that there should be something dogmatic written soon, as people are already beginning to copy the style without understanding it. The rules are very simple but difficult to observe . . .

Shelley’s stanzas April 1814 ‘Away the moor is dark beneath the moon’ are written according to the rules I advocate—with the exception of a false quantity in line 11, the roughness of line 15 and 22 and from his clip of one accent too many in line 17 . . .

Unfortunately nothing came of this project. Bridges and Patmore became friends because they were both passionately interested in the craft of poetry. The attraction between Hopkins and Patmore was more subtle. Both men were deeply religious and immersed in the study of Catholic mysticism. Unlike Bridges, both felt that they should dedicate their poetic powers to the glorification of God. At the same time, there was the added attraction of this intense pre-occupation with the technique of their craft. Coventry Patmore, as Bridges points out, had devoted years of study to questions of metre and prosody and, in 1878, had prefaced his favourite poem *Amelia* with a long treatise on Metrical Law. Even during the period of his friendship with Tennyson technical problems had often been the topic of their conversation.

Alice Meynell, the most subtle of Patmore’s interpreters, corroborates this in the essay which she wrote as an introduction to the Catalogue of Coventry Patmore’s library, where she says:

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Metre delighted him. He justly held that his mastery of the octosyllabic verse with its rhymes was worth the long study he had given it. The words, as has been said, were born alive; their order was to him a matter of keen pleasure. The lines and pauses of the Odes, measured chiefly by the variable breathing of thought and passion, he holds to be the work of an art all his own, even his own discovery. Let it be noted that when he talked of his poems, it was of their metres.

We have already mentioned Gerard Hopkins's obsession with questions of metre and technique. Moreover, he was a Catholic priest and an intellectual, as well as a poet. Consequently, he was one of the few friends who could really understand and appreciate the later Odes. Hopkins's character too, must have exercised a peculiar fascination over his friends. Claude Collee Abbott, in his excellent introduction to *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*,* gives us a vivid portrait of his remarkable personality, in which the intense æsthetic sensibility of the poet was subordinated to the voluntary self-denial of the priest. Mr. Abbott says: 'Bird song, cloud-scapes, and those bright boroughs the stars were his particular delight. His truly inward descriptions have a country savour, and the flush and bloom that means life.' Like Walt Whitman, he had an all-embracing love and sympathy for his fellow-men. His own words on this side of his nature are revealing: 'I always knew in my heart Walt Whitman's mind to be more like my own than any other man's living. As he is a very great scoundrel, this is not a pleasant confession.'

A few weeks after Patmore's visit to Stonyhurst the correspondence began. During their brief meeting, Hopkins had talked a great deal about his friend Dixon's poetry. He was anxious that Patmore should read Dixon's latest poem *Mano*. Patmore wrote back from Hastings:

Many thanks for your letter and the information about the poems. I shall send for *Mano*, and will be delighted to examine Bridges' verses. I quite agree with you about the archaisms which so many of our best living poets affect, and also, in the main, about rhymes. . . . What you say of *Prometheus the Fire-Giver* makes me very anxious to see it. If you could come and

*Oxford University Press. 1935.

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spend the night here, I need not say that I should have the greatest pleasure in seeing you again.

The growing public interest in his work urged Patmore to issue a final collected edition of all his work. He sent the poems to Hopkins, who spent much time reading and criticising them, and eventually sent him a long, detailed examination of *The Angel in the House*.*

Coventry Patmore's reply is unexpectedly humble, considering his well-known reputation for arrogance and splendid isolation. He wrote on September 18th, 1885:

I am exceedingly grateful to you for the trouble you are taking in sending me most carefully considered notes and suggestions, with nearly all of which I agree, and most of which I shall endeavour to adopt. I cannot recover the mood in which I wrote, and were I to remodel a passage, however short, I fear the alteration would look like a patch of a different colour. This may probably be my excuse for not acting on one or two of your strictures, though I think them quite right.

Again, on the 31st October, he wrote to Hopkins:

Your careful and subtle fault-finding is the greatest praise my poetry has ever received. It makes me almost inclined to begin to sing again, after I thought I had given over . . .

I agree with almost all your criticisms on *The Unknown Eros*, but I fear that some of the most important cannot be acted on simply because they are so important. I do not feel up to anything much beyond merely verbal corrections. In my present state of poetical incapacity which has lasted for two or three years, and may probably be permanent—I could only act on your very just objections by the extinguishing of the poems affected by the faults you point out, which I should be loth to do, though of course, I would do so, if the balance of good seemed to require it.

It was the complement of Patmore's critical attitude towards the work of other men that he was always eager to accept criticisms of his own work. In fact, he admitted to a friend,

*See *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, edited by Colleen Abbott, for complete text of these letters.

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Mrs. Walford the novelist, 'that he was too fond of consulting his friends and discussing his writings with them when in manuscript.'

This reliance on the opinions of others was probably the real reason for the destruction of the manuscript of his prose work *Sponsa Dei*—a work which Patmore himself told Bridges 'could not but have made a greater effect than all I have ever written.'

This little book was the principal outcome of Patmore's meditations during the last ten years. Gosse tells us that he actually began writing it in 1881. In substance, it continued the moods and ideas of his volume of verse *The Unknown Eros*.

The *Sponsa Dei*, this vanished masterpiece, as Gosse says,

was not very long, but polished and modulated to the highest degree of perfection. No existing specimen of Patmore's prose seems so delicate, or penetrated by quite so high a charm of style as this last book was. . . .

The subject of it was certainly audacious. It was not more nor less than an interpretation of the love between the soul and God by an analogy of the love between a woman and a man: it was, indeed, a transcendental treatise on Divine desire seen through the veil of human desire. The purity and crystalline passion of the writer carried him safely over the most astounding difficulties, but perhaps, on the whole, he was right in considering that it should not be shown to the vulgar. Yet the scruple which destroyed it was simply deplorable; the burning of *Sponsa Dei* involved a distinct loss to literature.

Gosse lays the whole blame for the destruction of the manuscript on Gerard Hopkins's shoulders. In view of Hopkins's letter on the subject, and of other circumstances, this seems to be unfair.

Coventry Patmore had already attempted this theme in the three remarkable odes called *Eros and Psyche*, *De Natura Deorum*, and *Psyche's Discontent*. These poems had aroused tremendous controversy among his friends. Clothed in splendid language, Elizabethan in its magnificence, these Odes certainly dared to describe feelings and emotions that tore the veil away from subjects which Victorian Society considered both 'unpleasant' and 'unmentionable'. In the words of Sir Shane

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Leslie, 'the flaming content of Patmore's *Unknown Eros* left Swinburne panting in his gilded brothel. At a swift swoop Patmore made himself the companion of Saint Teresa and all the mystics, who have believed that God could be infatuated for love of their souls.'

Disguising his theme under the symbolism of pagan mythology, he was following in the steps of his own daughter Emily. Here, as in the lost *Sponsa Dei*, Patmore attempted to interpret the love between the soul and God, in terms of the love between man and woman. In these poems, and in the later prose work *The Rod, The Root, and The Flower*, Patmore was to prove himself a great psychologist of Divine and Human Love.

In January, 1884, Hopkins, having read these poems wrote:

This poem and the two next are such a new thing and belong to such a new atmosphere that I feel it as dangerous to criticise them almost as the *Canticles*. What I feel least at my ease about is a certain jesting humour, which does not seem to me to quite hit the mark in this profoundly delicate matter. . . . 'A single touch in such a matter may be "by much too much".'

The austere spirit of Gerard Hopkins recoiled before the passionate heat of such passages as this from the Ode *Eros and Psyche*:

O, heavenly Lover true,
Is this thy mouth upon my forehead press'd?
Are these thine arms about my bosom link'd?
Are these thy hands that tremble near my heart,
Where join two hearts, for juncture more distinct?
By thee and by my maiden zone caress'd,
What dim, waste tracts of life shine sudden, Like moonbeams
On windless ocean shaken by sweet dreams!
Ah, stir not to depart!
Kiss me again, thy Wife and Virgin too!
O Love that, like a rose,
Deckest my breast with beautiful repose,
Kiss me again, and clasp me round the heart,
Till fill'd with thee am I
As the cocoon is with the butterfly!

And later in the same Ode, the soul infatuated with God and

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yearning for mortification like the mystical saints of old, cries out:

“In all I thee obey! and thus I know
That all is well:
Should’st thou me tell
Out of thy warm caress to go
And roll my body in the biting snow,
My very body’s joy were but increas’d;
More pleasant ’tis to please thee than be pleased.
Thy love has conquer’d me; do with me as thou wilt,
And use me as a chattel that is thine!
Kiss, tread me underfoot, cherish or beat,
Sheathe in my heart sharp pain up to the hilt,
Invent what else were most perversely sweet;
Nay, let the Fiend drag me through dens of guilt;
Let Earth, Heav’n, Hell
’Gainst my content combine;
What could make nought the touch that made thee mine!”

To a man like Hopkins, who felt that even his poetical vocation must be sacrificed to the service of God, and who could write the following letter to his friend, Dixon, when the latter urged him to write more verse:

I am ashamed at the expressions of high regard which your last letter and others have contained. This I say, my vocation puts before me a standard so high that a higher can be found nowhere else. The question then for me is not whether I am willing (if I may guess what is in your mind) to make a sacrifice of hopes of fame (let us suppose), but whether I am not to undergo a severe judgment from God for the lothness I have shown in making it, for the reserves I may have in my heart made, for the backward glances I have given with my hand to the plough, for the waste of time the very compositions you admire may have caused and their preoccupation of the mind which belonged to more sacred or more binding duties, for the disquiet and the thoughts of vainglory they have given rise to . . . I have never wavered in my vocation, but I have not lived up to it . . .

to such a man, there was something disturbing and almost shocking about the pagan delight with which Patmore exalted the human body. The difference between them was that whilst

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Hopkins considered his religious vocation more important than his poetical genius, Coventry Patmore, like Hopkins's other friend, Robert Bridges, felt that his poetic mission transcended all religious scruples. 'The poet,' he says, 'alone has the power of so saying the truth, "which it is not lawful to utter".'

In 1885, the correspondence between the two poets had explored so many paths of poetical criticism, and raised so many tantalising points of argument that the older man longed to see Hopkins again. Hopkins by this time had moved to Dublin, where he was teaching at Trinity College. There had been a necessary break in their intercourse, caused by the distance that separated them and Hopkins's new responsibilities. But in the April of this year, Hopkins broke the silence. In a long letter, he urged Patmore to pursue his project of writing a great poem in praise of the Marriage of the Virgin Mary:

You will never be younger: if not done soon it will never be done, to the end of eternity. Looking back afterwards you may indeed excuse yourself and see reasons why the work should not be done, but it will not have been done: what might have been will not exist. This is an obvious and a homely thought, but it is a good one to dwell on. You wait for your thoughts voluntary to move harmonious numbers. That is nature's way; possibly (for I am not sure of it) the best for natural excellence; but this poem was to be an act of devotion, of religion; perhaps a strain against nature in the beginning will be the best prospered in the end.

You think, as I do, that our modern poets are too voluminous: time will mend this, their volumes will sink. Yet, where there is high excellence in the work, labour in the execution, there volume, amount, quantity tells and helps to perpetuate all. If you wrote a considerable poem more it would not only add to your works and fame its own weight or its own buoyancy, but it would bulk out and buoy up all the rest. Are Virgil's Georgics and Bucolics read more or less for his having written the *Aeneid*? Much more. So of Shakespeare's and Dante's sonnets. It was by providence designed for the education of the human race that great artists should leave works not only of great excellence but also in very considerable bulk. Moreover you say in one of your odes that the Blessed Virgin seems to relent and promise her help to you to write in her honour. If this is not to be followed, it is but a foolish, scan-

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dalous saying. You will not venture to say heaven failed to do its part, or expect others to say so; either then you deluded yourself with groundless hopes or else you did not take the pains of correspondence with heaven's offers. Either way the words would better have been left unsaid. This is presumptuous language on my part, yet aimed at the Blessed Virgin's honour, and at yours . . .

Patmore replied on the 7th of April:

I was very glad indeed to see your handwriting again, and still better pleased to hear that there is a chance of seeing you this summer.

I believe that I have done all that it will be possible for me to do in the way of fulfilling the intention you speak of; but I do not think the work will ever take the form of a poem. I have written a series of notes which I propose shall be published after my death, under the title of *Sponsa Dei*. I do not think they would be more, or so, impressive in verse. They lend themselves as little to verse as the Epistles of St. Paul would do—though there ends their likeness. I should much like you to read them and hope that you will do so when I see you.

During the summer, Patmore's eagerness to see Hopkins again increased. He even offered to come up to Hampstead, where Hopkins's family lived, or to go as far as Stonyhurst in order to meet him again. For, as he wrote in one letter to Hopkins:

I assure you that I shall always regard my having made your acquaintance as an important event of my life, and there are few things I desire more than a renewal of opportunity of personal intercourse with you.

Finally the meeting was arranged, and Hopkins came to Hastings for a week at the beginning of August.

We know little of this meeting except that Patmore showed Hopkins the manuscript of *Sponsa Dei*. To Patmore's disappointment Hopkins did not approve of the book. He told Patmore that he thought it too intimate, dealing as it did with so 'mystical an interpretation of the significance of physical love in religion', to be placed in the hands of the general reading public.

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Despite the attempts of Mr. Claude Colleer Abbott* to prove the contrary, this view seems to be confirmed by the hitherto unpublished letter from Hopkins to Patmore which he wrote directly after this visit. A censored version of the letter was published by Champneys and copied by Abbott but the significant passage about contemplation which can only refer to the *Sponsa Dei* was deliberately suppressed†.

Writing from University College, Dublin, on August 21st, 1885, Hopkins said:

My dear Mr. Patmore,

Before going into retreat to-night I write to give you and Mrs. Patmore and the Misses Patmore my best thanks for your kindness to me during my happy stay at Hastings.

I am glad you let me read the autobiographical tract: it will be a valuable testimony.

I do not know that you need trouble yourself about Denzinger: Dr. Rouse's judgment will do. After all anything however high and innocent may happen to suggest anything however low and loathsome. But as I am upon this subject I may mention in proof of the abuses high contemplation is liable to, three things which have come to my notice—(1) Molinos was condemned for saying (and proving, as the unhappy man thought he did, from scripture) that during contemplation acts of unnatural vice might take place without the subject's fault, being due to the malice of the devil and he innocent; (2) Fr. Gagliardi, S.J. (early in the history of our Society) found a congregation of nuns somewhere in Italy who imagined that such acts were acts of divine union; (3) such practices appear widely in the Brahmanic mystic literature, though naturally the admirers of the Vedas and their commentators have kept dark about it—but here, (not in the Vedas) we now learn they are. The Apostle St. Jude also alludes to something of the sort also. I am sorry to disgust you with these horrors; but such is man and such is Satanic craft. *I could not bring myself to speak by word of mouth.*

Believe me very sincerely and gratefully your

Gerard M. Hopkins, S.J.

*See Introduction to Claude Colleer Abbott's *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins, including his Correspondence with Coventry Patmore*. Oxford University Press, 1938.

†The original letter in my possession has the whole passage about contemplation pencilled out—probably by Champneys.

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This significant passage about the dangers of contemplation is the only concrete evidence we have of Hopkins's reactions to what we may presume was the *Sponsa Dei* manuscript and I have italicised the last line of Hopkins's letter to emphasise the force of his comments. The earlier reference in the letter to the autobiographical tract seems to be misleading as Champneys says that Patmore did not write this until 1888 and the actual manuscript of the autobiography is dated Epiphany, 1887, and there is nothing in it to warrant such an outburst on Hopkins's part. Moreover, we know that the two poets discussed the *Sponsa Dei* during Hopkins's visit.

Patmore lost no time in replying to Hopkins. On August 23rd, 1885, he wrote:

My dear Fr. Hopkins,—I am glad to know that you did not pass your short visit here unpleasantly. It was a great pleasure, and much more, to me. I had arrived at the same conclusion as you about my reading Denzinger. If once one departs from the straight line of direction there is no safety from confusion.

Yours affectionately,

Coventry Patmore.

The brevity of this note indicates that Patmore was taken aback by Hopkins's admonitions. Indeed, the effect of such a warning from a man whom he admired and respected must have wounded the spirit of so essentially a proud and religious man as Patmore. Heinrich Denzinger, referred to in the above letters, was a leading theologian of the modern Catholic German school and professor of dogmatic theory at Wurzburg. He was the author of *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum* published in 1854 and frequently reprinted afterwards. After Hopkins's visit, Patmore took other opinions on the *Sponsa Dei*, that of Frederick Greenwood included, and two years later he decided to destroy the whole work.

Whilst Gosse blames Hopkins for this event, it must be remembered that Patmore was given to impetuous acts of this kind.

On Christmas Day, 1887, he secretly burnt the entire manuscript. He told no one about its destruction until the end of January the following year, when Gosse, then his literary executor, visited him. Then one day at breakfast he said to

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Gosse, abruptly, almost hysterically, 'You won't have much to do as my literary executor?' and he proceeded to tell him of the fate of the book. Gosse records how, on hearing the story, his family exclaimed: 'O Papa, that is why you have been so dreadfully depressed since Christmas!'

Gerard Hopkins, himself, was sorry that he had spoken so strongly about the book.

He wrote to Patmore on May 6th, 1888:

Your news was that you had burnt the book called *Sponsa Dei*, and that on reflection upon remarks of mine. I wish I had been more guarded in making them. When we take a step like this we are forced to condemn ourselves: either our work should never have been or never undone, and either way our time and toil are wasted—a sad thought, though the intention may at both times have been good. My objections were not final; they were but considerations

I forget now, with one exception what they were: even if they were valid, still if you had kept to your custom of consulting your director, as you said you should, the book might have appeared with no change, or with slight ones. But now regret is useless . . .

Alice Meynell always maintained that although Coventry Patmore destroyed the manuscript of *Sponsa Dei*, the substance of its contents were to be found in his last book of essays, *The Rod, The Root, and The Flower*. A letter of May 11th, 1888, seems to bear out this suggestion, and to exonerate Hopkins from the blame that has been heaped on his head. Undoubtedly, Patmore had destroyed the manuscript of his own free will:

I did not burn *Sponsa Dei* altogether withal. I further consulted whom you mentioned, after what you said. I talked with Dr. Rouse about it, and he seemed to have no strong opinion one way or another, but said he thought that all the substance of the work was already published in my poems and in one or two of my papers [*St. James's Gazette*].

So I felt free to do what your condemnation of the little book inclined me to do.

The two men continued to correspond until Gerard Manley Hopkins's death on June 8th, 1889.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Lymington

COVENTRY PATMORE had meant to spend the rest of his life at The Mansion House, Hastings. He loved the old brick house. He felt happy there with his young wife and his youngest son growing up before his eyes. Suddenly, in 1891, the owner of the house died, and despite the agreement by which Patmore leased the house for his lifetime, the new owner gave him notice to leave. Patmore was indignant. He loudly lamented 'the immense trouble and loss to me in various ways, I having built a big church opposite my door' and brought up many other arguments, but all were of no avail.

Francis Patmore, then still a boy, tells us 'I was with him in the garden when he got the letter. He was much agitated. "Kneel down, Piffie," he ordered, "and ask God to find us another house." I knelt on the gravel path and prayed as I had been told. Within a week we had an offer of The Lodge, Lymington, which proved an ideal home for the poet's last years.*'

After his indignation had died down, Patmore accepted his new residence with characteristic optimism. He left his family behind and went alone to inspect the new home. 'It was a bluish building,' says Gosse, 'standing coyly askew among trees, very retired and dowdy-looking, on a muddy point of land opposite the Isle of Wight.' Patmore wrote to his wife:

The house here is very attractive. It is about the size of ours, only a little queer and ramshackle in its construction, which makes it all the more individual. The gardens and grounds (three acres) are much nicer than ours, being much wilder and better timbered. . . . The surroundings are most beautiful and inspiring, Lymington is rather larger than Lewes, but more

*These recollections of Coventry Patmore come from an article by Francis Patmore, written at my request, and first published in the *English Review*.

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dignified. Not a single new house in it, and with much better shops. Priest, whose acquaintance I have made, an uncommonly pleasant and intelligent man. Four good doctors the best of whom I have consulted and who tells me the place is exceptionally healthy, and he has never heard of any evil of the house, although it is at the water's edge, and at low tide there is a deal of mud. This is the principal objection. It rather spoils the look out when the tide is down, and there is distinct odour of sea-mud. I feel most strongly inclined to make an offer. Mr. Weld has promised me the refusal for a month . . .

The strange neglected house appealed to his imagination, and he decided to take it. Soon he liked it so much that he was calling it 'The most desirable estate in the county of Hampshire'.

He wrote to Robert Bridges :

We like the new home better and better every day. I have never seen a better planned or more characteristic house. It is a good size—some 33 rooms—about four times as large as we want—but somehow we have swelled our five selves out so as to fill it all—that is to say, to have an appointed use for every part. You need never fear that there may not be a spare room for you. We have a lovely garden of about three acres, and the views from the windows are more like the shores of Maggiore or Lucerne than anything else I have seen in England . . .

The Lodge, on the estuary at Lymington, still stands somewhat forlornly among the trees, but already the name of Patmore is forgotten there. Yet the house was the scene of many remarkable week-end parties. Francis Thompson often stayed there, Alice Meynell and her husband were frequent visitors, and Sargent came down to paint one of his famous portraits of Coventry Patmore.

The Lodge was very much cut off from the outside world. There was but one post a day, no delivery of newspapers, no Sunday trains, a toll of a half-penny and a voyage in a ferry-boat across the estuary every time one wished to visit the town. This sense of seclusion admirably suited the poet's temperament.

He lived a life apart from the world, surrounded by his wife, his two unmarried daughters, and his adored Piffie. There was

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always something of the Oriental Pasha in Patmore's character —this may explain his marked political championship of the Turks—and he now indulged this side of it to the full. Yet there were moments when he complained of living 'in a wilderness of fair women' and yearned for male companionship. That he was capable of friendship with men is proved by a letter which Robert Bridges wrote to him about this time. Bridges was still a neglected and unread poet, and he wrote to Patmore on October 30th, 1894:

Thank you very much for your warm friendship which you have allowed me to see, and which I feel very deeply, and all the more because I move about in a world [*sic*] unrealised and consider my own little artistic efforts as almost worse than nothing.

Perhaps it is the providential final cause of Reviewers and such worldlings to encourage one into a contrarious mood of self-conceit so that one may keep active.

According to promise I told Bell to send you the last collection of my lyrics, in which you will find the new ones, and among them a verse here and there which will please you: but you must really understand that I am loth to trouble you with them and do not consider them for their own sake worthy of your acceptance.

But on the whole he was happiest in the society of women. In this he was very un-English and, as Osbert Burdett remarks in his *The Idea of Coventry Patmore* (see pages 206–7) 'this suppression [of interest in his fellow men] explains a subtle element in his style, and a latent prejudice against his work in the minds of most readers'. He had always possessed a rare sympathy and understanding for women, and this accounts for the fascination which he held for them. His letters written to Harriet Patmore—the only really intimate letters of his married life that have survived*—display how even as an ageing man he could play the part of husband and lover. Here is the sensualist, the Eastern lover who demands complete surrender, a being who shocks by his almost unnatural exultation in the delights of the marriage bed.

*Basil Champneys in his *Coventry Patmore*, Vol. I, page 141 admits to suppressing many of Patmore's letters to Emily Patmore as they were too intimate.

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Among Harriet Patmore's papers is this fragment recalling the happy moments of their married life. Scrawled across a piece of writing paper are these words :

To my dearest, with renewal of the vows of entire love and fidelity, which have never been broken for a moment.

C.

I do not know what gift accompanied this touching note. Perhaps it was a rare necklace or a ring, for he loved her to wear beautiful jewels. After twelve years of married life, he could still write to Harriet on January 3rd, 1893 :

My own sweet wife,

I entirely respond to your dear New Year's letter. Before another New Year's Day comes around, I am convinced that this phantom trouble will have all vanished, and that you will feel thoroughly well. But I am and always have been as much yours, and more than in former days.

You have been for twelve years a thoroughly good and sweet little wife, and your trouble, during the past few months—although it has greatly troubled me—makes me love you the more, since it shows how much you love me.

I rejoice more than you can think in your unexpected restoration to substantial health, and I have always prayed, and will always pray that you may live many a happy year to be a blessing to me and to Piffie.

Your ever loving husband,

Coventry.

The rôle of the third 'Angel in the House' was not an easy one, but Harriet Patmore was a woman of tact. She loved her husband and she was wise enough to humour his varying moods—she had learnt the art, not always easy, of being the wife of a famous man. Sometimes her days would be clouded with 'phantom troubles'; and she was sometimes jealous of his brilliant London friends, especially Alice Meynell. But these momentary fears and doubts were amply compensated for by the genuine depth of her husband's love and affection—for his infidelities were only spiritual or intellectual.

Her parents at Lewes were in ill-health, and this would mean that she sometimes had to leave him alone at Lymington. At

Lymington

other times she would pay a brief visit to London. Then letters from him made up for any brief unhappiness she may have felt:

My dear little Woman,

I do not feel up to going to London to-morrow . . . I miss you very much, and shall probably find my solitude unbearable before the end of the week. If so, I shall run up and see you, and will write beforehand. . . .

I found my loneliness too much for me, even last night, so I spent the evening at the Knowles's.

I have a big load of melancholy upon me

Perhaps it is the cold.

Your Loving Husband

Tell me daily about your doings and Piffie's.

Another time he wrote during one of their brief separations:

You were kind and sweet, Dear, this morning, and—do believe me—I love you as much or more than ever I did.

Sometimes there were misunderstandings, and then he would send a peremptory note—in which brusqueness was mixed with humour:

Don't be naughty. Come on Monday by the early train—and finish your Dress here.

You are under obedience you know. Do not rebel.

And :

My dear, yours would be a very wicked little letter if you really meant it, but I know you don't.

I shall kiss all such perverse feelings out of you when I come back.

Sometimes when Coventry was away in London, or visiting Stonyhurst for a retreat, he would suddenly long to see his wife. He hated sleeping alone and missed 'his lullaby'. Even in retreat at Stonyhurst, he could write to her: 'I hope to hold you in my arms to-morrow.'

One day, whilst she was staying at Winchelsea, he wrote to her:

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Piffie was delighted with the flowers and shells. We have been watering the garden together, and he seems as happy as the day is long. I don't think I have heard him cry once since you have been at Winchelsea. I hear his little song the first thing in the morning, and he sings all day, for his talk is the sweetest song I have ever heard . . .

He finished the letter with the following admonition :

Mind you eat and drink well. Don't spare the port wine.

During the summer of 1894, staying as usual at the Grosvenor Hotel, he came up to London to sit to Sargent for the portrait which is now in the National Portrait Gallery. Sir Edmund Gosse had been instrumental in arranging this matter, and as Patmore was a great admirer of Sargent's work the sittings were a great success. In his enthusiasm, he wrote to Gosse: 'He seems to me to be the greatest, not only of living English portrait painters, but of all English portrait painters.'

His letters written to his wife describing the progress of the work are interesting, particularly as this picture is admitted to be one of Sargent's greatest works. With pardonable vanity, he was anxious to look his best for his sittings:

In order to be in good looks for Sargent, I have spent the greater part of every day, since I came, in bed.

And he told her :

The portrait is fearfully like. It is quite ferocious at present. I had much interesting talk with Sargent.

A little later he wrote :

Sargent is not going out of town this week as usual, so I am to have sittings daily until the end, which I should think would be by Thursday or Friday next. He is doing his work *con amore*, and will not leave off until he has done his best. He has wonderfully softened the expression, but he says it is still 'too aggressive'. I feel sure you will be delighted.

And a few days afterwards :



COVENTRY PATMORE.

From a sketch by Sargent for the Boston Library Group where Patmore is painted as the Prophet Ezekiel

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My dear,

I have had nothing from you but the postcard on your arrival. I hope you are not ill. I have been sitting all day to Sargent. He said he had a fit of inspiration on him, and begged me to give him the afternoon as well as the morning. The portrait will be a splendid picture, and a likeness which, I think, will please you.

I told him you were horrified at my being taken smoking a cigarette; so he has taken that out. The ferocity has likewise disappeared. He wants you to see it before it is finished.

The days drag a good deal. I cannot get up spirits to go to see people.

I slept very ill last night, as usual—for want, I suppose, of my lullaby.

Your
Coventry.

Soon the portrait was nearly finished. His great new friend, Alice Meynell, brought her sister, Lady Butler, famous for her own war pictures, to see it in the studio, and both declared that 'it could not be finer'.

Meantime, the painter himself liked painting his eminent sitter so much that he asked him to sit for one of the Prophets in his great decorative group for the Boston Library. He also started work on a second portrait,* for, as Patmore wrote to his wife: 'He says I ought to have two portraits painted of me, as it is impossible to give the whole character in one.'

At last, the first portrait was finished, and Patmore wrote to Gosse:

As you were instrumental in getting the portrait done, I ought to tell you that it is now finished to the satisfaction, and far more than satisfaction of everyone—including the painter—who has seen it. It will be, simply as a work of art, the picture of the Academy.

He also wrote to his son Tennyson Patmore in the same vein:

Mr. Sargent, the greatest portrait painter in Europe, has just finished my picture. It will be in the Academy. It is fame to be painted by him!

*This second portrait, head and shoulders, is now in the Tokyo Museum, or was before the recent world-war.

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The picture was indeed one of the sensations of the Royal Academy in 1895, and was caricatured in *Punch*.

Gosse, apart from arranging the Sargent portrait, also introduced his friend to Cambridge where he had been lecturing. Ever eager to enlist new admirers for the ageing poet, he shows a charming solicitude for Patmore's visit to the University in the following letter, dated 3rd November, 1886:

If you would come on Saturday from St. Pancras by the train leaving at 12.3, you would reach Cambridge at 1.27. If you would then take a cab to the Great Gate of Trinity you will reach me in comfortable time for lunch at 2. My lecture would have been over an hour. I should have time to rest, and should give the remainder of the day entirely to your entertainment.

I have asked the select few, about twenty, to meet you in my college rooms to tea at 5; I have accepted an invitation to dinner for us both to Prof. and Mrs. Henry Sidgwick (so bring dress-clothes). On Sunday night you will dine in hall, and I have a men's smoking party afterwards. Everybody is anxious to meet you, so you must put on your best roar and be an amiable lion.

Coventry Patmore, undoubtedly, enjoyed his renewed fame. The lonely years of neglect, the gibes of his enemies and the *Athenaeum*—he had survived them all.

Among the men attracted to him at this last stage of his life was Frank Harris. The two men first met through Frederick Greenwood, the editor of *The St. James's Gazette*, famous for the part he played in the purchase of the Suez Canal shares. Harris, now at the height of his success, and about to dazzle society with his wealthy marriage and to become editor of *The Fortnightly Review*, for which he persuaded Patmore to write a number of articles, describes the encounter in his *Contemporary Portraits*:

The extravagant contradictions in him appealed to me intensely. Patmore at the time was sixty-three or sixty-four years of age. He must have been tall as a young man: he was still perhaps five feet ten or so, thin to emaciation, with an upright dignity of carriage and imperiousness of manner; his likings and dislikings already aphoristic as if he had thought much about

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subjects and come to very definite and pointed conclusions. His forehead was curiously broad like Cæsar's; his chin, large and bony, his eyes, too, grey, keen, challenging; altogether he looked like a man of action rather than a poet.

Harris then goes on to describe what an extreme Tory Patmore had become:

Patmore cared nothing for the social up-lift of the working class, no spiritual improvement in it he opined; he would not see that some material betterment had to come before any spiritual growth was possible. He preached the gospel of peace and love, yet at the same time insisted upon an increase of militarism; got into a fever about the smallness of the British Navy, and saw the hope of the world in British domination . . .

And he concludes:

a little while after this, I got a letter from Patmore asking me to remember my promise to come down to stay with him at Hastings. I went down for a week-end and never enjoyed a couple of days more in my life.

Patmore took a very gloomy view of the political future of the world all through his later life. 'Poor Piffie,' he once said to his favourite son, 'you have a hard time in front of you.'

His intense individualism dreaded the progress of democracy and the emergence of a state-controlled society. In one of his last essays he foresaw a world very close to that advocated by Fascists and Communists:

The prying despotism of the vestry—the more 'Virtuous' the more paltry and prying—persecuting each individual by the intrusion of its myriad-handed, shifting, ignorant, and irresistible tyranny into the regulation of our labour, our household, and our very victuals. . . . It will be a despotism which will have to be mitigated by continual tips, as the other kind has had to be by occasional assassination.

Neither the voter nor the inspector yet know their power and opportunities: but they soon will. We shall have to 'square' the district surveyor once or twice a year, lest imaginary drains become a greater terror than real typhoid; we shall have to smoke our pipes secretly and with a sense of sin, lest the moral

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supervisor of the parish should decline our offer of half-a-crown for holding his nose during the weekly examination of our bed-rooms and closets; . . . we shall have to tip our policemen and inspectors for looking over our infractions of popular moralities of a newer pattern.

And he began the essay *A Pessimist Outlook*, from which the above is quoted, with the solemn warning:

Despotism which is not government, but anarchy speaking with one voice, whether it be the mandate of an irresponsible emperor or that of a multitude, is the 'natural' death of all nationalities.

To-day we forget how intensely all the Victorians felt about their country. Even Gerard Hopkins could write to Patmore in 1886:

Your poems are a good deed done for the Catholic Church and another for England—for the British Empire, which now trembles in the balance, held in the hands of unwisdom . . .

His old friend, Thomas Woolner, the sculptor, could also write on September 6th, 1884:

I have just returned from Salcombe, having spent a day or two with Froude. I grieve to say he has an equally depressed opinion of the British Empire as we have, and sees no change except through horrible convulsions. I personally scarcely hope for anything as good as convulsions leading to improvement, my terror is inward rot, and disintegration; because they make so little outward fuss, and are seen by careful observers only.

And Patmore himself, filled with a patriotic indignation, could fulminate against the hated Gladstone in the Ode—1880-85:

Lo, how the dross and draft
Jeer up at us and shout,
"The Day is ours, the Night is theirs!"
And urge their rout
Where the wild dawn of rising Tartarus flares.
Yon strives their leader, lustng to be seen
His leprosy's so perfect that men call him clean!

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Patmore's deep hatred for Gladstone even disturbed the domestic quiet of the house at Lymington. He would frequently brood over the 'murderer of Gordon', and one of the first sentences he taught little Piffie was 'Damn Gladstone and Home Rule'!

In a modern world tormented by the question of armaments, it is interesting to read his letter to the *St. James's Gazette* of March 12th, 1888:

THE REVANCHE, SEDAN OR WATERLOO?

To the Editor of the *St. James's Gazette*,
Sir,

At a time when our terrible shortcomings in the means of national defence are at last awakening serious popular concern, you will perhaps allow me to indicate a danger which, though it seems obvious, has never yet, as far as I am aware, been insisted upon. It is that the humiliation of France by the German victories may be revenged upon us.

It is not an injustice that the whole French nation is burning to punish, but loss of prestige which it is raging to recover; and this might be recovered just as well by beating us, who are vulnerable, as by beating the Germans, which the French are beginning to see there is little chance of their being able to do

In their present state of feeling, à Londres and *Plus d'Angleterre* might in a moment become war-cries which would be fully as infuriating as à Berlin and *Alsace Lorraine*, and a hint from a Government which declared itself to be at last prepared for the achievement of a signal retaliation would make all Frenchmen forget Sedan to remember Waterloo. The French just now have no particular reason for hating us, but their condition of mind towards us shows that they do not require any particular reason, unless it be reason enough that it is centuries since we have bitten the dust as they have now been compelled to do.

France has of late years shown a wonderful power of reticence. The whole nation has, by tacit consent, pushed on its portentous military preparations with as much silence as possible, so as to give Germany no unnecessary and premature offence . . .

We are out of that great league of mutual protection which we might have joined, and might still join if we would; and it would be too much to ask of Prince Bismarck in a crisis of national life or death to refuse to look on without interference at an enterprise against us which might leave him free to grapple with Russia, and which he might with good reason

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believe would end in permanently assuaging the lust of France for her *revanche* against his own country . . .

He then goes on to complain that England is reducing her armaments whilst France is increasing her armament expenditure. Apparently the letter caused considerable stir, for he notes later that 'Greenwood tells me that my letter in the *St. James's Gazette* headed "*The Revanche, Sedan or Waterloo?*" made a great impression in the highest political places. He heard it gravely discussed at Hatfield [the country seat of Lord Salisbury] and considers that it was the very beginning of that serious consideration of what the French might be really looking forward to which ended in the vote of twenty extra millions for the new ships—the very sum I named in my letter.'

In his later years, Patmore wrote frequently for Greenwood whose paper, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, coincided with his own political views. He described this paper as 'the only one fit for a gentleman', and when Greenwood took over the *St. James's Gazette*, he was a regular contributor, writing one hundred and twenty articles on a number of subjects between the years 1885-91.

So strongly did Patmore feel on political issues that in 1884 he had written to Greenwood:

Dear Mr. Greenwood,

Who so fit as yourself to initiate the combinations which you advise for the preservation of the national life and of all that is dearest to good men?

A saturated solution will sometimes crystallise and solidify suddenly if any solid particle is cast into it. Can I do anything towards forwarding the chance of energising the public will?

I am by no means a rich man; but I am willing to bind myself to contribute a thousand pounds towards raising a really practical opposition to the ministerial treason, and, if necessary, 'meeting force by force'. If I could further assist by acting as a sort of secretary or intermediary, or in any other way with you, nothing would make me so happy as to leave my retirement and to live in London for the next few months and act wholly under your direction.

You would not, I believe, find me afraid of labour, or of any inconvenience that might arise.

Lymington

His intense interest in politics is further illustrated by the well-known epigram he had written during the Franco-Prussian War. This was improvised during a dinner at Heron's Ghyll, and he used to remark laughingly that it was 'the most popular poem he had ever written'. It refers to the Kaiser's telegram to his wife Augusta, referring to the victory at Woerth:

This is to say, my dear Augusta,
We've had another awful buster,
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below!
Thank God from whom all blessings flow!

But that was a long time ago. He wrote little now, and his health was failing slowly. Encouraged by friends, he collected his essays and published three volumes of prose during this last phase of his life. *Principles in Art* was published in 1889, and in 1893 he issued *Religio Poetæ*. Finally in 1895, the year before he died, there appeared what is probably the most remarkable of his prose works, *The Rod, The Root, and The Flower*.

Religio Poetæ brought praise from Walter Pater, who wrote to him: 'Your essays are one more proof that true poets make excellent critics, and sometimes genuine connoisseurs of art.'

This volume contained the well-known essay on Alice Meynell in which, under the title of *Mrs. Meynell*, he wrote:

At rare intervals the world is startled by the phenomenon of a woman whose qualities of mind and heart seem to demand a revision of its conception of womanhood, and an enlargement of those limitations which it delights in regarding as essentials of her very nature, and as necessary to her beauty and attractiveness as woman.

And he goes on to say:

I am about to direct the reader's attention to one of the very rarest products of nature and grace—a woman of genius, one who, I am bound to confess, has falsified the assertion which I made some time ago, that no female writer of our time had attained to true 'distinction'.

And again:

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In no other authoress of this century can anything be positively inferred, concerning the character of the writer, from her works: but there breathes from almost every paragraph and stanza of these two little volumes the indefinable but unmistakable perfume of a sweet, noble, and singular personality. Mrs. Meynell's style is like the subtle and convincing commentary of a beautiful voice . . . The best of this lady's essays, which seldom run to greater length than about five or six pages, are so perfect that to give extracts as samples is like chipping off a corner of 'specimen' rubies or emeralds for the like purpose. Their value is not in arithmetical, but in geometrical proportion to their bulk.

Thus he showed the world how deeply he loved and respected her genius. He placed a wreath of laurels at the feet of the woman whose friendship was the most important event in the last years of his somewhat lonely life.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Alice Meynell

Never, surely, was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle human sanctity with such quiet grace, with so understanding a smile.

Richard Le Gallienne on Alice Meynell.

LIKE a triumphing tide, his life was ebbing to its final close. Recognition and praise were at last beginning to be his, and now a last great love swept across his life, searing his spirit with the intensity of its cold passion. He had known love in all its disguises. Now he was to experience love in one of its most subtle and dangerous forms—the infatuation of the intellect.

Coventry Patmore's friendship for Alice Meynell was so deeply felt that only the word love can describe it adequately. She gave him the understanding and appreciation he had always craved when she wrote to him: 'I have never told you what I think of your poetry. It is the greatest thing in the world, the most harrowing and the sweetest. I can hardly realise that he who has written it and who is greater than his words is celestially kind to me and calls me friend.'

How could he resist this brilliant woman, who adored his poetry with such a passion that she could write to him: 'I hope you will forgive me for keeping your MSS. a little longer. They are quite safe, and I cannot tell you what a consolation it is to me to read them as I can get time. But I read them with many tears and my heart is full of sorrow.'

And another day, she could write, with charming femininity, 'I have read the "Odes" yet again with a new amazement. And then after my tears over them, I bought a new frock to please you.'

They had first met through their mutual admiration of each

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other's work. Alice Meynell had written an article on his poetry in the *National Observer* in 1891—then under the editorship of W. E. Henley. The article had paved the way to their closer friendship, and soon Coventry Patmore was a frequent visitor to the Meynells' house in Palace Court. He had never met any woman like her before. The cold brilliance of her intellect infatuated his own remarkable mind, and he was seduced by her elusive femininity. Her rarefied presence drew forth all his hidden gentleness and gallantry. This exquisite lady, so understanding yet so distant, whom he later described in the lines 'Her body, too, is so like her, sharp honey assuaged with milk', held him in thrall.

What was the secret of this woman, of whom when she was seventy J. C. Squire could write:

She still gave an impression of youth and beauty. She sat, quiet Roman dignity in her mien; vivacity, feeling, sympathy in her eyes: a saint and a Sibyl smoking a cigarette.

In the words of Osbert Burdett:

If we turn to the drawing by Sargent (that drawing done at Patmore's request), which adorns the volume of her collected Poems, what do we see? We see a tall, slender figure, the stem, as it were, of a delicate refined face, a face a little weary, as if it were masked with the ashes of a fire which had wasted the spirit within. The distinction, the beauty is apparent, but there is the sense, often to be observed in an aristocratic face, of the end, of the weariness of a long road, most of which lies behind the traveller. The thread which binds the sheaf of Mrs. Meynell's verse is a thread of sadness. Renunciation, we perceive, is the characteristic subject . . . Life is a burden to this poetess, not a joy. It imposes too great a strain upon her nerves.

Patmore had waited years for someone to recognise the true quality of his *Odes*. The companionship of women had always been essential to him, as Valéry Larbaud points out: 'L'artiste ne pouvait pas vivre sans une femme près de lui.' Now Mrs. Meynell gave him both the appreciation and the companionship he had always sought. Her daughter Viola wrote:

It is his art of poetry that overwhelms and captures her, an

Alice Meynell

art so quick and close that it is the voice less of a poet than of the very Muse. That the greatest poetry has a simplicity beyond imagery she had discovered by means of him . . . His poetry broke her heart, and was the happiness of her life.

Wilfred and Alice Meynell were the centre of a rising group of brilliant young writers. They both welcomed their distinguished new friend with an eagerness that must have flattened the older man. They constantly invited him up from Lymington to stay with them at their house in Palace Court, and Mrs. Meynell would tempt him to go with her to the many parties and receptions to which she was invited.

Frequently, she succeeded in luring him up from his country seclusion. And whilst he was staying with them at Palace Court, he wrote to his wife left at home:

Dearest,

Here I am after a very pleasant journey. The Meynells make as much of me as before.

If they were entertaining Shakespeare or Dante, they could not be more anxious to please and distinguish, and they so manage it that one cannot but feel gratified by their adulation . . .

London is quite empty, but it is one of those days that make it look as bright and pleasant as the country.

Viola Meynell in her book *Alice Meynell* shows how even the Meynell children subscribed to this adoration:

Though Coventry Patmore's visits to Palace Court were fairly frequent it was never anything but a stirring event when he came. He was very much a connoisseur, and even ordinary things seemed like treasure when they passed through his hands. He loved jewels, but did not know whether a diamond or a haystack was the more attractive form of prosperity. He had the quality of rarity, in his distinctive appearance and height, in the importance that was his naturally. On his visits to town he shared a little of my parents' social life, even as he liked to share their working life, though to one so fastidious as he none but the choicest occasions might be offered. Wilfred Blunt and the beautiful Lady Colin Campbell were friends to be made known to him.

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How happy these London visits made Patmore is illustrated in the following letter to his wife :

My dearest Soul,

There was a very interesting Dinner Party here yesterday. Henley and I took to each other quickly. He wants me to go to a party at his house on Tuesday . . . I have been to Greenwood to-day. He seems to be all right in health.

I am in clover.

Mrs. Meynell and Greenwood are the only persons after *Obby* [his wife] and Piffie, who are able to give me the sensation of *society*.

Yours,
Coventry.

Mrs. M. says she will be delighted to come for a fortnight ending October 10th, if you can have her and two little girls.

Wilfred Meynell was editor of the *Weekly Register*, an important Catholic paper, as well as of another periodical called *Merry England*, and editorial duties kept both husband and wife very busy. Mrs. Meynell was also a frequent contributor to other journals. Her health was not good, and kept her friend in a constant state of alarm. Back at Lymington he would worry himself about the strain of overwork imposed upon his two friends. Then he would write to Wilfred Meynell:

My dear Wilfred,

You and Alice must find it very hard to get on with your next numbers of your two periodicals. It has struck me that I might help you by sending a little article for the next number of *Merry England*—if it is not too late. Command me also for correcting proofs of *Register*, or anything else I can do for her and you in trouble. I do hope she will take care of her dear self.

She seems strong, but she may rely too much on her strength which, perhaps, is rather that of spirit than body, and she may break down suddenly and fatally. Give my love to your poor darling.

I pray many times a day for her and Bastian* . . .

Two days later, the anxious friend wrote again :

*Bastian was one of the Meynells' children who had caught pneumonia and was causing the parents great anxiety.

Alice Meynell

My dear Wilfred,

You will not think it meddling on the part of one who has probably had much more experience than you of illness and the very serious effects of long nursing, if I venture to caution you against letting Alice watch too long . . . I have had bitter experience of this in myself, and others near to me; and I fancy that Alice requires especial caution, by reason of her splendid spirit, which would keep her up in any trial while it *lasted* . . .

When those family worries were over, he invited the Meynells down to Lymington, and the quiet change refreshed his overworked friends. Sometimes Alice Meynell came alone, then Coventry Patmore would write gratefully to her husband:

I hope that you will be able to come down and stay a night or two; and come back again to fetch her. Thank you for letting her come. I can guess how much happiness you give up in giving up a fortnight of her sweet society by the pleasure which the prospect of enjoying it gives me.

After these visits from Alice Meynell, he felt an intolerable loneliness. He missed her so much. Then he would try to visualise memories of his last visit to Palace Court. For a moment he could recapture the happy sense of her presence, as he describes it in one of the little poems he wrote to her:

Alicia's Vanities

A rustle on the staircase
Gives the heart gay warning;
With a laugh like many primroses
She flies the children's chase;
And she comes in to breakfast,
As bright as a May morning,
All the day's glad duties
Shining in her face.
'You *are* an early caller!'
'I have brought you my review.'
In haste she takes her coffee;
Then she rises, and we two
Draw our chairs towards the fender,
And I read her praise while, sweet,
She smiles in contemplation
Of her fame and her small feet.

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In these lonely moods, an unexpected invitation from Palace Court would throw him into a transport of delight. 'I need not tell you and Alice with what gladness I accept your invitation for the 11th,' he would write to Wilfred Meynell. 'Since she left us I have not known what to do with myself for want of her society; and the prospect of two or three days with her sooner than I expected is a boon for which I thank you more than words can say.'

The link between the two households was affectionate and intimate. Whilst Alice Meynell was staying with the Patmores, her children would write such letters as this one from her daughter Monica. 'Tell Mr. Patmore he's a brick for loving you so much that I appreciate him awfully.'

The two friends took a devoted interest in each other's work. Alice Meynell wrote to him: 'Don't forget to send me the books so that I may have the infinite pleasure of being of some little service to you in giving your work that scrupulous revision to which I have accustomed myself, and which an author never gives to his own writings.'

Friendship, however, did not blind her critical sense. She saw his greatness, but she also saw his defects, as the following letter dealing with *Religio Poetæ* and other essays testifies:

My dear Friend,

You will receive your volumes which I post to-day. I know you will excuse the boldness with which I have suggested one or two small alterations merely for the sake of beauty. Sometimes the word 'which' occurred perfectly correctly, but not prettily, several times in one sentence. I have taken it out, substituting 'whereof' or a participle.

It has been a happiness to read again, through and through, the words of the greatest intellect I have ever known. To me the truth of your teaching is much more than convincing, it is evident instantly; the only effort I have to make is to understand—a most happy effort. But why is it that some passages—a very few and all in the later book—trouble me by getting no interior assent from me at all? . . . I would ask you to reconsider 'Distinction'. Believe me, it does such injustice to living writers (so does 'William Barnes' indeed) that it is almost a confession that you do not thoroughly know the men you slight. And that is so extremely irritating to people that I am inclined

Alice Meynell

to think it has caused the partial boycotting of your work. . . .

But worse than this is the quarrel in it with the *Spectator* and the *Guardian*. Your attitude has been always one of singular dignity. I have always thought so, and I think so more now than ever. Nor does 'Distinction' contain anything that does not appear in one form or another elsewhere.

In order to gain him readers, she proposed to make a selection of his poetry, with an Introduction written by herself. In this selection she hoped 'by choosing among his less difficult poems to give a world that was indifferent or estranged an easy approach to this unknown treasure as one might hope for any great good suddenly to befall mankind'. Her choice therefore, did not consist of 'best passages' but 'of poems concerned with the human and intelligible feelings of delight and sorrow.' The book, which was called *Poems of Pathos and Delight*, was first offered to John Lane, but was eventually published by William Heinemann in 1895.

In such ways did the two friends offer homage to each other. To this woman, admired by all the brilliant intellects of the day, Coventry Patmore's praise was that which gave her most pleasure. When he praised her, she wrote to him: 'I ought now once and forever to lay aside my vanity and ambition and desire for recognition—indeed I do.'

It was in the course of this great friendship that Patmore met the other star of the Meynells' circle—the poet, Francis Thompson. The story of how Wilfred Meynell discovered this poor and starving young poet and gave him a home and the protection of his wonderful friendship is too well known to be repeated. Francis Thompson practically lived at Palace Court, so that it was inevitable he should see a good deal of Patmore.

In a letter to Harriet Patmore, Coventry mentions their first meeting:

Yesterday [Sunday] was Mrs. Meynell's day 'at home' and there were several fine musicians and a good deal of music. Meynell's friends are, for the most part, tremendous radicals—so radical that I am amused, rather than angry, and they put up with my rabid Toryism with equal good humour.

I saw F. Thompson yesterday, and had some private talk with him. All I saw in him was pleasant and attractive—so I

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asked him to come for some Sunday to Lymington, which he joyfully promised to do . . .

There was instant sympathy between the two men. Francis Thompson often visited Lymington, and soon became the most important of all Patmore's new admirers and disciples. As he wrote to Patmore :

You are the only man with whom I can talk at all. With all others it is a matter of playing an intermittent chord or so, as an accompaniment to *their* talk . . . Yours is the conversation of a man who has trodden before me the way which for years I trod alone, and often desperate, seeing no guiding parallel among modern poets to my aims and experience.

Coventry Patmore's son, then a little boy, has left an amusing description of Francis Thompson's visits to Lymington—unlike his father, he had little respect for the poet :

Francis Thompson often stayed with us [he writes]. At first Patmore's admiring disciple, later his equal in the realm of mystic poetry, each found the other an ideal companion. Great poet though he was, I fear I had but a poor idea of him. A weakly little man, with untidy red hair and unkempt beard, he had a peculiar dread of dogs, and as he could not hide his terror of our retriever Nelson, I regret to say that my only feeling for him was unmixed contempt. But as my father delighted to feed the dog on huge quantities of raw meat, till it became the terror of the district, Thompson may be excused.

When Patmore visited his new friend at his monastery in Wales, Thompson wrote to Alice Meynell :

By the way, he repeated to me two or three short poems addressed to yourself. I hope there may be a series of such songs. You would then have a triple tiara indeed—crowned by yourself, by me, and highest crowned by him.

Later he writes to her again :

It was well understood between us—by me no less than by him—that it was no common or conventional friendship he

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asked of me. Now, therefore, has he sought out my Welsh hermitage; and scalpelled the fibres of me.

Patmore's friendship for Francis Thompson was deep and lasting. Even in the last year of his own life, when he was weak and in ill-health, he could write to Thompson during the July of 1896:

You were looking so unwell when we parted that, not having heard from you, I am somewhat alarmed. Pray let me have a postcard. If at any time you find yourself seriously ill, and do not find the attendance, food etc., sufficiently good, tell me, and I will go to Pantasaph to take care of you for any time you might find me useful. It would be a great pleasure and honour to serve you in any way.

It was Francis Thompson who comforted him during the last two years of his life, when he found his place in Alice Meynell's affections taken by another. For this great love and friendship which for four years had filled his days with passionate delight was to end in bitter loneliness and sadness. Perhaps he required too much of this exquisite lady, of whose works Thompson wrote: 'The footfalls of her Muse waken not sounds, but silence. We lift a feather from the marsh and say: "This way went a heron" . . . '

The poetess who writes in *Renouncement*:

I must not think of thee; and tired yet strong,
I shun the love that lurks in all delight,

could not bear the passionate heat of this friendship which threatened to devour her with its searing flame.

But for the present, the two friends met frequently. He sent her camellias to wear at Lady Jeune's receptions, and for her sake he left his country solitude for the social gaieties of London.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

London Life

LIFE in London during the ‘‘nineties’’ was a very different world from the one Patmore had known in the days of his first success—those far-off days when, as the young author of the *Poems* of 1844 he had attended the soirées of Lord Northampton, the parties of Monckton Milnes, and the literary salon of Mrs. Procter, with its eighteenth-century traditions.

This society was more frivolous, more light-hearted, and more decadent. It was the period of Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde, and of brilliant *arrivistes* like Frank Harris.

However, there is no doubt that Patmore enjoyed his re-entry into social life. His letters to his wife show that like every other man of eminence he was flattered by the attention shown him by his contemporaries at this late date in his life. Guided by the hand of his adored Alice Meynell, he attended dinners and parties with a quiet, amused interest.

Together, the two friends often visited Sargent’s studio for the painting of Patmore’s portrait, and one day Sargent drew Mrs. Meynell at her friend’s request. They attended ‘‘studio’’ Sunday at Sir Frederick Leighton’s, then at the height of his popularity.

As he wrote to his wife:

Yesterday, I went to the Meynells’ to luncheon, and afterwards to Sir F. Leighton’s. It was ‘‘Studio Sunday’’ when all the great artists show their pictures to their friends. Leighton’s great house was thronged with fashionable people. I asked him to let me have cards for the private view that I might bring you. He said that cards went, as a matter of course, with the Anniversary Dinner. I am told that to receive an invitation to this Dinner is the greatest social distinction of the London Season. Gosse seemed astonished at such proof of my newly acquired eminence. I thought he seemed rather jealous. There were a

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good many people at Gosse's dinner, whom, it seemed, I ought to have known more than I did. The talk was rather literary shoppy, and a good deal of it not much in my line. They want Bertha and Gertrude to stay there for a few days when they go to town. To-day I have had a fatiguing day, and am now going to have a siesta before going to dinner at the Meynells. Greatest part of the day has been occupied in trying to get a pair of Elgin friezes for the Hall. Bracciani told me I must go to the B. Museum to choose, as he had not the casts made. At the Museum I endeavoured in vain to select out of half a mile of perfection, and I left in despair, but fortunately I met Sidney Colvin at the gates, and he has promised to give me a small list of the very best to choose from.

The Private View is on the Friday preceding the dinner, not the Monday after. This will make it more convenient for us.

To-day it is not easy to recall the princely manner in which painters like Leighton, afterwards Lord Leighton, and Alma Tadema lived. However, one has only to read of the huge sums they received for their pictures to understand the material ease of their lives. In fact, Victorian Society held the writer and artist in far higher respect than the modern hostess does to-day.

One of the leading hostesses of this period was Lady Jeune, later famous as Lady St. Helier. Describing one of her receptions which he had attended, Patmore was frankly delighted at being asked, and wrote to his wife: 'I think you will agree that I shall be justified in leaving my card (in gratitude for future favours) on Lady Jeune.' His description of the party is so characteristic that it is worth giving in full:

The Party last night was an immensely swell affair. Every-body of note in 'Society' seems to have been there. I heard only accidentally a few names, but these show what the whole (about a thousand persons) must have contained. Lord Salisbury, Mr. Goschen (the great Chancellor of the Exchequer, Conservative) Mrs. Chamberlain, Lord and Lady Londonderry, the Turkish Ambassador, and a lot of others with names which I forget. Sir Francis and Lady Jeune are Conservatives, and the assembly was mainly Conservative, but *all* parties were represented. For example (don't faint) I was introduced to T. P. O'Connor, the great Parnellite! Greenwood and about half-a-dozen other people I knew were there. Lewis Morris was there, and stared

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at me with a very sour look, which someone to whom I was talking explained by saying that Morris looked upon my being there as a bid for the Laureateship. Alfred Austin and Sidney Colvin were there, and three or four people expressed to me their astonishment at my 'condescending' to appear in London Society. Sir Stephen de Vere introduced himself to me. There was an absolute surfeit of diamonds, pearls, and other precious stones. Lord and Lady Stanley of Alderley were there, and a host of other undoubted 'swells'. So you see I was not in such depraved company, on the whole, as you decided that I should be. The Royal Family—three or four Princesses at a time—are often at these parties. All the streets in the neighbourhood were filled with a double line of carriages. There must have been more than a mile of them. The Meynells seemed to know a great number of the best people there.

It is pouring with rain, but if it clears, I shall go to luncheon at Greenwood's—Jessie Greenwood was there, looking very nice. Thank you, dear, for thinking of the Camellia, but, alas, it came in ruins. They won't bear travelling. Mrs. M. says that the three I sent her had all fallen to pieces. Meynell's eyes are still very painful.

Lewis Morris, the poet mentioned in the letter, was a Welsh poet, who was then enjoying a great popularity as the author of *The Epic of Hades*.

The mention of the Laureateship, then vacant by the death of Tennyson, illustrated once again Patmore's indifference to worldly success. I do not think that he would have greatly prized the honour, for he had never once acted in a manner calculated to secure him such a worldly prize. His conversion to Catholicism, in the first place, made his appointment an impossibility. Moreover, when his name was suggested to Gladstone, who was Prime Minister at this time, Gladstone replied that Patmore 'had died many years before'. As Sir Shane Leslie remarks: 'Mr. Gladstone, who had a facility for remembering poetry, good and bad, had perhaps not forgotten the sting in Patmore's lines.'

Coventry Patmore was not always an easy guest to entertain as witness the following letter to Harriet Patmore:

My dear little Wife,

All your letters have given me great pleasure; they are so

cheerful and like yourself. We are going to be *quite* happy again, are we not? I am looking forward eagerly to getting back to you to-morrow. As the days are longer and it will give me time to get luncheon at the Grosvenor on my way to the Railway, I shall return by the 2.25 train. I went to Greenwood's yesterday, and he mentioned many great people at the Party of whom I had not heard, but I forgot most of their names. He was much shocked to hear of your accident. You speak of 10 o'clock as the time of the Party, and for all good Christians to be in bed, but we did not leave Palace Court till past eleven o'clock, as we wished to seem fashionable, and at 11.30 the people were all swarming into the Party. I have been sleeping much better this time. I feel quite fresh and lively to-day. The party seemed to take away Mrs. M.'s headache. She is all right to-day. It is raining fast, and I am having a solitary morning, sitting alone in my room, and meditating very much as I do at home. After breakfast Mrs. M. always says 'I have got something to do that will take me about three minutes,' and she appears again about luncheon time . . . Yesterday there were three literary men to dinner—not famous, but fairly clever and quite gentlemen. But I do feel the average literary man a great bore. He talks shop so. I spent much of my evening downstairs in my own room smoking. I had nothing to say, and felt that I might be thought sulking, when I was only—as usual—stupidly silent and uninterested.

Gosse has left an amusing description of Patmore as he behaved at these parties:

Little parties suddenly collected to meet Patmore at luncheon or dinner were found to be the most successful form of entertainment; for though he would sometimes scarcely say a word, or would wither conversation by some paradox ending in a crackle and a cough, it was discovered that he believed himself to have been most indecorously sparkling on these occasions, and would long afterwards refer to a very dull small dinner as 'that fearful dissipation'.

Gosse also tried to lure Patmore to one of his dinners of the Omar Khayyám Club of which he was President. In a letter dated 24th October, 1896 he wrote to Patmore:

The Committee of the Omar Khayyám Club ask for the

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honour of your company to dinner as the Guest of the Club, at Frascati's on the 20th of November (Friday).

Do come, if you can. You will give an immense amount of pleasure and meet some of the most charming representatives of art and letters. George Meredith came last year, and enjoyed himself very much. It is a very quiet, early affair—not even evening dress. Will you say yes?

When Patmore accepted, Gosse wrote to express 'the very great pleasure of the Club', and told Patmore that amongst the other guests would be Thornycroft, Conan Doyle, Pinero, John Davidson, and Sidney Colvin; and he sent a further letter of instructions on the 15th November.

The dinner on Friday will be a very easy affair. You will sit under my wing, eat and drink, survey the scene, listen to the speeches and have no fatigue at all. You will be able to leave very early, if you find yourself getting tired, and I think you will enjoy, without exhaustion, the very warm welcome which you will receive. On the other side of you at table will sit Hamo Thornycroft, the sculptor, who is a most delightful being. So you must not allow yourself to be in the least alarmed about the dinner, which is an informal and very easy affair. Frascati's is between Portland Road and Gower Street, in the northern side of Oxford Street. You will have to wear a white rose, but that I shall provide for you.

Ill-health prevented Patmore from attending the dinner, and Gosse wrote a final note:

I am sure you are quite right not to risk the fatigue and exposure of coming out. We shall all be very much disappointed but we shall remember you, and the whole company will drink a glass of red wine in your honour.

As your company has been announced and much looked forward to, it would be very kind and much appreciated if you would write me a little note to be read at the dinner, with some little statement of your feeling about Omar Khayyám or about FitzGerald. Would that be giving you too much trouble? It would be most charming of you, and would make it seem as if you were partly with us after all.

Patmore, never very strong in health, found all this social

life rather exhausting. But anything was worth while to be near Mrs. Meynell. Undoubtedly, his appearance in London caused quite a stir, for we find even the editor of the *Yellow Book* writing to him asking for a contribution. In his letter to Patmore, Henry Harland writes: 'I wish I could persuade you to let the *Yellow Book* have a poem. It would turn red with pride. Volume II will be in all respects better . . .'

Occasionally, he felt tired and exhausted. Then he longed for the quiet of his house at Lymington. Through all his adoration of Mrs. Meynell, he still loved his wife, and he wrote to her:

My own Dear,

I was very glad to get your nice long letter, only you omitted to tell me what I most wanted to know, i.e., the state of your health.

I had a good long night's rest last night, and feel all right again to-day.

I was going to see Sir Joshua's picture, but it is such horrid weather, snow and thaw and wetting drizzle, that I could not go out farther than the Greenwoods. There was no snow in London till last night, but a tremendous frost.

You say you have had no letter. I posted one myself in good time on Saturday, and another yesterday. I am very glad you liked the first *Eros*. I had no idea that you had not read it.

As I said nothing in reply to the Meynells' request for an extra day instead of Friday, they seem to have arranged things on the assumption that I should stay over to-morrow. They have got a very nice dinner-party—Baddeley, Greenwood, and Lionel Johnson have been invited. Nevertheless believe me, Dear, I would *rather* have returned to you to-morrow. You do not quite know or believe how happy I am to come back to you whenever I have been two or three days away from you.

I had a deal of *most* interesting talk about political secrets with G. this morning. To-morrow I intend to call on Henley, and to see the Sir Joshua. Greenwood admired my coat very much. Yesterday there was a large afternoon and dinner-party—mostly Conservative; but I felt so ill that I fear I passed for very morose and ill-mannered. Mr. M. tells me, however, that Lady Colin took a great fancy to me, and was delighted with my talk about 'specimen' gems, of which she has a great many. Do not fear. She is a really magnificent style of woman, of the professional beauty kind, and therefore not in my line.

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The Editor of the new Conservative *Pall Mall* was here with his affianced Bride, a very nice Italian girl, who speaks English perfectly.

Ever your,
Coventry.

'The magnificent beauty', Lady Colin Campbell, besides being a celebrated 'society' beauty was the author of several books, among them *A Woman's Walk* and a *Book of Running Brooks and of Still Waters*. The daughter-in-law of the Duke of Argyll, who also had literary pretensions, she was an intimate friend of the then Duke of Marlborough.

Patmore appreciated beautiful women, but he was never at his ease at large social gatherings. But for the sake of a brief moment with the lady he admired with such a passionate devotion the most tedious social function could be borne. Alice Meynell had unwittingly become his *Belle Dame Sans Merci*. Soon, like the knight in Keats's poem, he was to be left 'alone and palely loitering'.

At this period, whilst their friendship was still unclouded, he was in constant anxiety about Mrs. Meynell. Her frail health was being undermined by overwork. Both she and her husband worked very hard at their journalism, as a growing family and a large house made demands on their resources. However, they always managed to find time for their friends, and undoubtedly their devoted admiration for Patmore at this period did much to revive his reputation. Through their friendship, he had come to know such important figures as W. E. Henley, then the most influential literary editor of the day, Francis Thompson, and Lionel Johnson, another brilliant Catholic poet.

At this time, he wrote articles for Wilfred Meynell's paper *Merry England*, and the *Saturday Review*, and this also gave him a new and wider public.

His anxiety about Mrs. Meynell's health is reflected in the following letter to his wife, written from Pantasaph:

My dear,

I got here warm and comfortable, though the weather was so beastly . . .

We are *all* going to dine with Baddeley on Monday. Mr. Meynell goes to Mrs. Craies to-morrow. Mrs. Meynell looks

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very ill, and is very subject to determination of blood to the head. She looks full ten years older than she did at the beginning of the year.

There is a perfect frenzy going on about F T [Francis Thompson]. He is to be reviewed in the *Contemporary*, as well as the *Nineteenth Century*, and the *Fortnightly*, and he is already the rage at the Universities. I shall be nowhere!

Mr. and Mrs. M. [Meynell] are both in raptures with my article, of which I got the proofs. It reads much better than I thought it would.

Please write,

Your loving husband,

Coventry.

Another day he wrote to her :

The Meynells are making it as pleasant as they can for me. The large dinner-party yesterday—given expressly for me—was only *too* good. General Butler, De Vere, Baddeley, Dr. Parr (husband of the novelist), Mr. Coxe, Editor of the *Tablet*, are all good talkers, and made the evening to a late hour very lively. . . .

I am well, but rather tired. I do not get my fair allowance of sleep.

Mrs. M. is getting all sorts of commissions to write at very high prices, and works many hours *every* day.

Yours,

Coventry.

Sometimes he helped his friends with their editorial work. 'I called at Palace Court,' he writes, 'to ask if I could be of any use to Meynell; he is not allowed to use his eyes much, but he says he and his wife will be able to manage. I corrected about six columns of proofs for him, which he says is his most eye-trying work.'

By 1894, this great friendship reached its zenith, and suddenly this infatuation of two intellects threatened to become something more dangerous. Alice Meynell drew back afraid. Although all former biographers have been extremely reticent concerning the whole friendship, there is no doubt that Coventry Patmore had fallen physically in love with her. It

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was to be the final irony of his life that he, the psychologist of love, should in his last years feel all the agony of a frustrated passion.

Frightened and disappointed, Alice Meynell withdrew into the crystal fortress of her intellect.

Coventry Patmore retired to Lymington, and, as Frederick Page comments: 'Patmore's and Alice Meynell's recognition of each other had been public, and they parted secretly in public; and in public, secretly, he endured the tender pain of her pardon.'

In the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in 1895, she printed these lines anonymously for his eyes:

Why wilt thou chide
Who has obtained to be denied?
Oh learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way,
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord
Of an unpurchasable word.
Oh strong, oh pure!
As Yea makes happier loves secure,
I vow thee this
Unique rejection of a kiss.
I guard for thee
This jealous sad monopoly.
I seal this honour thine; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair.

Soon he heard she had embarked on another great friendship with George Meredith. He wrote to Wilfred Meynell: 'Mr. Pember was here yesterday and spoke of the interest your wife's name is creating in London, especially in connection with her great new friendship. Give her my unalterable love.'

A little later, when Wilfred asked him to help Mrs. Meynell in some undertaking, he replied:

It may seem absurd to you and herself, but my power of doing anything more in that or any other matter has been paralysed by my finding, from her own words and acts, that my primacy in her friendship has been superseded. I shall be as much

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pleased as I can be at anything by appearing in her new Anthology, and, as I get no news from her now, I shall be very grateful for anything you can tell me about her.

Although her presence was withdrawn from him, he still took a deep interest in all her doings. He asks to be informed by telegram of her health. He reads all her work with an eager enthusiasm. He can still write to her husband:

What Jeffrey said in the Edinburgh Review about Keats' poetry is exactly true of your wife's prose. J. said that K's poetry was the test of capacity in the reader for the understanding of what poetry was. It seems to me that the faculty of discerning the merit of prose is almost, if not quite as rare. Your Wife's prose is the finest that was ever written, and none but kindred genius can see how great it is. I am glad to see that all the few competent judges are gradually coming to confirm all that I have ever said in her praise. If I were you, I should go mad with pride and joy.

In his distress, Coventry Patmore turns for sympathy to Francis Thompson, who also had laid his adoration at the feet of Alice Meynell.

In a remarkable letter, he says to Thompson:

God Bless you and help you to bear your crown of thorns, and to prosper in the great, though possibly obscure career He seems to have marked out for you! My work, such as it is, is done, and I am now only waiting, somewhat impatiently, for death, and the fulfilment of the promises of God, which include all that we have ever desired here, in perfection beyond all hope.

Dieu et ma Dame, is the legend of both of us. But at present Ma Dame is too much for the balance, peace and purity of my religion. There is too much heartache in it.*

And in November, 1895, he wrote again: 'My heart goes forth to you as it goes to no other man; for are we not singularly visited by a great common delight, and a great common sorrow? Is not this to be one in Christ?'

*I am indebted for permission to reprint this letter to Sir Shane Leslie, in whose book *Studies in Sublime Failure* it was first printed. A number of letters exchanged between Thompson and Patmore exist, and when they are finally released should prove remarkable reading.

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At the end of this same year, he displays to the world yet another token of his undying admiration for Alice Meynell's genius. He writes a letter to the *Saturday Review*, advocating her appointment to the Laureateship, which had been left vacant because it was considered that there was no one fit to succeed Tennyson.

And during the last year of his life, in June, 1896, he gives his last writing to the public. It is an essay on Alice Meynell's work in the *Saturday Review*, in which, referring to the poem *Why wilt thou Chide?* he acknowledges the verses so privately published for him. 'Here is Mrs. Meynell's "Belle Dame Sans Merci", which, I venture to prophesy, will some day rank not far below that of Keats. How incomparably noble, strong, passionate and pure are these words of consolation to the one lover who has been so near as to be denied.'

The will for life was gone. He now waited patiently for death.

It is tragic that this great friendship should have ended so sadly. It was the most hopeless of literary loves, and could have ended in no other way. Neither was to blame. Alice Meynell herself must have wished it otherwise, for her daughter, Viola, tells us in her *Life*:

It is to be feared that in this friendship, and in others, my mother did fail to some extent to make her love felt. She was selfless, compassionate, and one would have said, made of love, but she could fail to satisfy the friends she loved the most, him above any other. And that this particular kind of failure formed a definite feature of her life is clearly recognised in a letter written by her in her latest years. It was written to a nun of extraordinary holiness and intelligence, to whom my mother turned for wisdom and to whom she broke unhappy silences. 'All my troubles,' she says, in this letter, 'are little, old, foolish, trivial as they always were—the troubles of my spiritual life I mean. But as to sorrow, my failure of love to those that loved me can never be cancelled or undone. So I never fail in a provision of grief for any night of my life.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The End of the Journey

THE evenings at Lymington were sad and remote, when the sinking sun covered the mud banks of the estuary with molten splendour and the sea turned a turquoise blue in the changing light.

It was at this hour that he loved to walk after dinner through the country-side near his house. The brooding silence of night-fall suited his moods. Accompanied by his son Piffie, he would tramp along the lanes wrapped in silence.

In 1894, he had had a series of illnesses that undermined his strength. He was unable to walk far alone, and he suffered from weakness and vertigo.

Francis Patmore tells us that during these walks his father would grasp him by the neck and lean on him for support:

I was thus a human walking-stick, and though I often reached home almost broken by fatigue, for he was heavy to support, it pleases me to know that I never let him suspect the often acute suffering he quite unwittingly caused. During these walks he would often exclaim aloud: 'My God, how cold, how cold!' One hot July night, as I was sweating under his weight, I ventured to protest that he could not possibly be cold, especially as he always wore at night a heavy ulster. He said, 'Oh, it is a spiritual cold I feel.' And in this internal, spiritual life, his last years were far from happy, and his soul longed, I think, for death and to see his God face to face.

By 1896, it was obvious that he could not live much longer. In the January of this year he wrote:

One cannot live long without delight. But I have done the best I could with such faculty as I had. I have always given my heart to that which is highest and I can wait to die, as Clough said.

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The memory of Alice Meynell still haunted his thoughts, and a month before he died he wrote :

For the past four and a half years I have devoted myself exclusively to her service and would have gladly done so during the rest of my life.

A little later he wrote her a farewell note :

My dear Lady,

I am dying. Remember my last request. Let not your thoughts deny nor your heart forget the things your eyes have seen. Do not destroy the immortality of your truest visions by calling them moods. You are not disloyal to any lesser good in transcending the higher. Our meeting again in Heaven depends on your fidelity to the highest things you have known.

He waited for death unafraid. He wrote to his son Tennyson : 'I am dying slowly. It is a very uncomfortable process.' In the words of Champneys :

His face aged very rapidly : he found it more and more difficult to make the slightest effort to write a letter, even to sign a cheque. When starting for one of the very short walks which were all that he could now compass (usually to the hotel in the town, where he could rest for some half-an-hour and read the *Times*) he would not take the trouble to exchange his dressing-gown for an overcoat, and preferred to face the local society in this picturesque but unconventional garb.

Autumn drew on, and soon it was winter, that season of which he had written : 'It is not death, but plenitude of peace.' His family recall that during these months he was much given to talking of his earlier life. His mind went back across the years. He remembered the far-off days of his childhood : those happy days when he would sit at the feet of his grandmother, Clarissa Patmore, listening to her stories of times gone by. She had loved him very much. And his father too—what did he think of him? Poor Peter George Patmore, who was so kind and affectionate, and yet such a failure.

He remembered the early days of his struggle for a living. Those days when Lord Houghton had noticed him at Mrs.

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Procter's and asked her: 'And who is your lean young friend with the frayed coatcuffs?' and had then procured him the job at the British Museum Library.

Then he recalled his first wife, Emily. He remembered her as she was when he first knew her:

Like a young apple tree, in flushed array
Of white and ruddy flower, auroral, gay.

He remembered the agonising days when he knew that she was dying. Everything that he had written about love was below 'the intensity and delicacy of the plain reality'. Yet Emily had made him a poet, and her memory had been his greatest inspiration. Faces and voices crowding down the years—they reminded him of fugitive, happy moments. His daughter Emily, eager, young and ecstatic. His eldest son, Milnes, the sailor—he had loved him although he could never understand his rowdy, boisterous character, but had never won his love.

And Mary Patmore—so quiet, generous and kind—"the pure effluence of Catholic Sanctity". And his dear young poet son Henry . . . Death had taken them one by one. It had been like a cold wind blowing through his life.

Yes, he had suffered in his affections. Was the fault in himself? Perhaps Byron was right when he said to Lady Blessington: 'There is something I am convinced in the poetical temperament that precludes happiness, not only to the person who has it, but to those connected with him.'

Was Byron right when he explained the poetical temperament?

The way in which I account for it is [he said] that our *imaginings* being warmer than our *hearts*, and much more given to wander, the latter have not the power to control the former; hence, soon after our passions are gratified, imagination again takes wing, and, finding the insufficiency of actual indulgence beyond the moment, abandons itself to all its wayward fancies, and during the abandonment becomes cold and insensible to the demands of affection. This is our misfortune, but not our fault, and dearly do we expiate it; by it we are rendered incapable of sympathy, and cannot lighten by sharing the pain we inflict.

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Looking back, he must have pondered on the many things he had seen, The rise and fall of many literary reputations ; the sacrifice men of genius had made for worldly success. He had chosen a lonely path away from the crowd. He had sought out the Unknown Eros. In mystical contemplation he had beheld Heaven as 'the eternal agony of God's first kiss'.

In the words of his friend Francis Thompson :

He has trod the ways afar
The fatal ways of parting and farewell. . . .
And lo ! that hair
Is blanched with the travel-heats of hell.

He had 'drunk the moonless mere of sighs', and attained to 'the love ye shall not dare'.

Indeed he was ready for death. His austere spirit welcomed the release. His soul yearned for union with God. In the words of Constable's sonnet, which Sir Shane Leslie quotes as resembling the essence of Patmore's verse :

When death shall bring the night of my delight,
My soul unclothed shall rest from labours past
And clasped in the arms of God enjoy
By sweet conjunction everlasting joy.

Suddenly, in November, 1896, death came to him at last. He caught cold during one of his nocturnal walks, on Monday evening November 23rd. His doctor described the state of his patient :

He got up the next morning apparently in his usual health, but soon went back to bed, being suddenly seized with coldness and a violent attack of hepatic colic with sickness. I went to him immediately, and found him pale in countenance, with deadly cold extremities . . . He had often before thought he would not get over his illnesses, and on that day, the 25th, he said to me "What about going to Heaven this time?" I said we should try to keep him here as long as we could, when he remarked, 'I am afraid you are making the best of it.' I told him his illness was very serious. He was quite calm and undisturbed by my saying so.

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On November 26th, there was no hope of recovery. Bertha Patmore writes :

About 2.30 Father O'Connell came and read the prayers for the dying, and gave him the last blessing and Absolution. All the household were assisting at the prayers. Once Father O'Connell paused a moment, and Papa went on himself, saying, 'Depart thou Christian soul.' Dr. Hill came while we were praying and knelt with us. At the end of the prayers, we left Dr. Hill, Mamma, the sister and an old servant in the room. Presently Mamma was putting Papa's silver cross containing a relic of the true cross, by him, but he tried to put the string of it round his neck. Whilst Dr. Hill helped to do this, Papa said : 'This is for Piffie when I am dead. Dear little boy.' . . .

The afternoon drew on. The doctor left the room, and

Papa asked Mamma to kiss him. He put his arms around her neck, and said, 'I love you, dear, but the Lord is my Life and my Light.' After that, almost to the end, he kept trying to repeat a verse of a psalm, though he could not concentrate his mind enough to get the words quite right. About ten minutes to four the old maid came down to tell Kitty and me that Papa was really dying. . . .

He died just after four o'clock, and 'for the last quarter of an hour the labour of his breath ceased, and he was quite quiet and free from pain. He tried to put his hands together at last. He looked very peaceful after death'.

In London, when Alice Meynell received the news of his death by telegram, Viola Meynell records that she left the family assembled in the library, and went alone into the drawing-room. She says : 'I can remember having no proper realisation of what had happened—only horror that my mother should go into a dark room alone and remain there.'

A few days later, his youngest and favourite son, Piffie, was sent for to attend the funeral. He was still a very young boy and he writes :

The preceding evening I shall never forget. Many of his friends that came down from town for the burial on the morrow, were sitting around the fire in the dining-room at the Lodge.

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My half-brother, Milnes, the Bishop of Portsmouth and the rest were discussing rare pottery as the undertakers brought the heavy coffin down the stairs (for the body, after the Catholic custom, was to lie that night in the church) bumping it from stair to stair in a horrible manner. My half-brother rang for more drinks to be brought; there was no answer and still the terrible noise went on without. Again he rang the bell angrily, and at last the parlourmaid, Agnes, appeared sobbing at the door. Through the open door came the sound of the leaden coffin crashing down the last three steps. The guests unconcernedly talked on. The Bishop helped himself to a drink. A child cowering in a corner unnoticed, sobbed in terrified grief.

Coventry Patmore lies buried in the Catholic portion of the Cemetery at Lymington, wrapped at his own request in the habit of the Franciscan Order. An obelisk marks the place, a fitting memorial to a man who once remarked 'What am I that flowers should touch me?'

Many mourned his death. Francis Thompson wrote of him: 'Age alone will grasp in some dim measure what must have been the unmanifested powers of a mind from which could go forth this starry manifestation, and 'what silence full of wonders' interspaced his opulent frugality of speech . . .' Sadly he regretted his dead master and friend with these lines:

O how I miss you any casual day!
And as I walk
Turn, in the customed way
Towards you with the talk
Which who but you should hear?
And know the intercepting day
Betwixt me and your listening ear;
And no man ever more my tongue shall hear,
And dumb amid an alien folk I stray.

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